

TENTS Tool for Teamwork Observations: An Instructional Guide

Introduction

A team's success rests largely on its ability to communicate effectively, the presence of strong leadership, each member's willingness and ability to continually monitor situations and share this awareness with fellow team members, and the team members' mutual support of one another. Observations of the presence or absence of these behaviors are an important part of overall teamwork evaluation. Using a tool during observation can help ensure thorough assessment of the team's behavior.

The TENTS Tool

The Teamwork Evaluation of Non-Technical Skills (TENTS) observation tool was developed by Susan M. Hohenhaus, MA RN, FAEN, Stephen Powell, MS, and Robert Haskins, BS. The tool uses a 5-point scale to assess behaviors that are part of the four core constructs of teamwork in TeamSTEPPS—communication, leadership, situation monitoring, and mutual support.

We modified the tool slightly to capture additional information about the teamwork event, such as the observer's comments on the behaviors, and omitted one of the behaviors under mutual support/assertion.

Conducting Teamwork Observations

Observers should familiarize themselves with the tool and the concepts behind the teamwork elements and behaviors before beginning observations. It is important for observers to remember that only the team's interpersonal behaviors are being evaluated, not quality of the team's clinical performance. Because clinical skill is not being assessed, observers do not need to have a clinical background in order to perform teamwork observations, although it is helpful for observers to have a basic understanding of the procedure or process they are observing.

If possible, it is helpful to have two observers assessing teamwork events simultaneously. This aids in capturing as many behaviors as possible and preventing possible misinterpretations of behaviors or observer bias.

In most clinical settings, however, it is often not practical or possible to have two observers assessing teamwork events at the same time. In these cases, sites can opt to have one observer (the same person conducting all observations) or multiple observers (a group of people taking

turns conducting observations) assessing events over time. Pros and cons of having one, two, or multiple observers are listed in the table below. If multiple observers are used, it is important to ensure that all of the observers have the same understanding of the teamwork concepts and scoring. Whenever possible, observers should assess their inter-rater reliability and be certain that it is strong before beginning observations.

Observer	Pros	Cons
Single observer, same person for all events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistency across observations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for bias or misinterpretation
Two observers, same people for all events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Captures the most behaviors • Prevents misinterpretation and bias 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time-consuming • Potential for getting in the way of clinical staff
Multiple observers, different person/people for each event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less time-consuming for individual observers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for inconsistencies in ratings

When assessing a teamwork event, observers should be mindful of where they are standing. Although it is important to hear and see all communication among team members, it is critical that the observer stay out of the way of the clinical procedure or process.

Using the TENTS Tool

The first section of the TENTS tool provides space for the observer to record details about the teamwork event, such as date, time, location/unit, type of event, and the number of clinical staff present.

The second section of the TENTS tool lists the teamwork behaviors to be observed, as well as overall teamwork and overall leadership. Descriptions of how to observe each behavior are available below. Next to each behavior is a space for the observer to provide a score and comments about the team's interactions. Scores range from 0-4, where 0=expected but not observed, 1=observed but poor, 2=observed but marginal, 3=observed and acceptable, and 4=observed and good (with "good" meaning the behavior could be used as an exemplar to show others). If the behavior is not expected or observed, then the observer should record N/A for not applicable.

Observing the TENTS Behaviors

Below we provide instructions on what observers should look for when assessing the TENTS teamwork behaviors.

1. Communication

- a. Sends and receives appropriate information. *Observe the team sending and receiving information in an appropriate manner to other team members. This includes tone of voice and body language.*
- b. Asks questions. *Observe that team members are comfortable “speaking up” and asking questions.*
- c. Uses feedback between team members. *Assess team members’ abilities to acknowledge and act on or explain dissent to comments and suggestions from other team members.*
- d. Sends and receives information to/from patient/family. *Observe the team sending and receiving information in an appropriate manner to a patient and or family member. This includes tone of voice and body language.*
- e. Uses appropriate critical language. *Assess the team’s use of critical language (“I need you now”).*
- f. Uses teamwork tools (i.e. SBAR, brief, huddle). *Assess team for standardized language like SBAR or periodic planning and updates.*
- g. Debrief completed. *Assess team for method of “learning together” following event (uses standardized language such as SBAR to review and makes suggestions to improve the process.)*

2. Leadership

- a. Establishes event leader and effective leadership. *Assess the team for a leader. The leader may not always be the most senior team member, and may change depending on the circumstance (i.e. surgeon is team member for management of the case, but the patient has a difficult airway and the team leader is anesthesia provider).*
- b. Verbalizes plan: States intentions, recommendations, and timeframes. *Assess for standardized methodology such as a “time out” or other standardized event.*
- c. Delegates as appropriate. *Assess whether the team leader takes the opportunity to delegate to other team members as appropriate. The “leader” may shift depending on the event. For example, if the surgery tech is the most experienced in running a particular piece of equipment and it malfunctions, s/he will likely be the person who needs to delegate for the “fix.”*

- d. Instructs as appropriate to the situation. *Assess whether the team leader takes the opportunity to instruct other team members as appropriate. Once again, the “leader” may shift depending on the event. For example, if the surgery tech is the most experienced in running a particular piece of equipment, s/he will be the teaching team leader.*

3. Situation Monitoring

- a. Visually scans environment. *Observe that the team members are visually inspecting monitors, infusion pumps, ventilator/oxygen functioning, patient responses, telephone calls, other members entering room, etc.*
- b. Cross monitors activities; uses back-up behavior. *Observe the team for how they are aware of each other and the contributions, strengths and weakness various team members.*
- c. Verbalizes adjustments in plan as changes occur. *Observe for changes especially those that may be quite subtle. Are team members thinking out loud?*

4. Mutual Support/Assertion

- a. Secures additional resources. *Observe for the team’s willingness to ask for help or additional resources. This is one of the most difficult aspects of clinical observation as you may not be aware of what each team might need that they are not asking for. Talk with team members (when appropriate) about what other things that they usually ask for during an event like the one you are observing.*
- b. Supports others. *Observe for active support between team members. Does the resident assist the nurse by putting in the Foley catheter or does the nursing administrator help by writing team members name on the board during resuscitation.*
- c. Prioritizes appropriately. *Assess how the team accomplishes tasks. There may be no verbalization of plans and priorities or there may be too much conflicting information.*
- d. Employs conflict resolution. *Assess whether the team is able to settle conflicts. Subtle conflicts can be more difficult to recognize. Be careful not to intervene; allow a resolution to evolve unless there is a safety threat.*

5. Overall Teamwork. *Some teams will have leaders who set an excellent tone, but whose team members do not respond well to this leadership. Others may have a weaker team leader but the team “pulls together” and compensates for this. This is where your opinion is valued as you observe any of these behaviors.*

6. Overall Leadership. *Observe the response of the team to the team leader.*