



HEALTH CARE PROFESSION AND SOFT SKILLS

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“More than prescriptions, medicine involves communication, tolerance, flexibility, listening, hard work and a passion for the practice.”

Floyd Loop, MD (Loop 2009)¹

Introduction: Healthcare service is one of the hardest and most emotionally draining professions. Doctors not only treat the patients who are sick and injured, but also offer advice and emotional support to patients and their families, take care of financial matters as well as day to day complexities. They are working throughout the day and night. So it is most important for them to maintain their physical as well as mental health

Although intelligence is a vital structure of success for healthcare professionals but to trust on pure intelligence to manage the difficult situations in modern healthcare is as good as inviting career distress. Intellect is helpful, but is only one of many keys to success for healthcare professionals. For this, they should be well equipped with soft skills also.

As rightly said by William Osler, “A good physician treats the disease, while a great physician treats the patient who has the disease”. So one must not be just technically strong but should be sensitized towards the suffering of the patients.

The tools generally required for healthcare professionals to succeed, fall into two categories: hard and soft skills (Klaus 2008)².

Hard skills are specific, teachable abilities that can be defined and measured. They can be learned in school and from books. They are quantifiable, such as earning a degree or certificate or operating a machine. By contrast,

Soft skills are less perceptible and harder to measure, more personality-oriented interpersonal skills, such as teamwork, flexibility, patience, persuasion and time management. They are not taught well in schools and do not have a set path, and are learned by trial and error.

Medical schools as well as allied health training programs mainly focus on clinical knowledge and clinical skill acquisition but not on the soft skills. Recently, lot of research is being carried out on the importance of soft skills and proved to be the most critical skills in this field. The essential soft skills for Health care professionals are

1. Communication Skills

Communication is the integral part of the medical profession. Medical professional has to communicate not only with the patients but also with his relatives, seniors, colleagues, assistants, technicians, nurses,



administrative staff etc.

Effective communication helps these health care professionals to form good relationships and to work well together.

Effective communication results from³

- Active listening
- Clarity in messages
- Proper eye contact
- Empathy
- Tone, pace and content of speech
- Facial expressions

There are certain barriers to communication, which one should be aware of.

Factors which affect effective communication are

- Language differences
- Environmental problems
- Emotional distress
- Health problems
- Sensory deprivation
- Disability
- Cultural differences
- Use of jargon, slang and acronyms

2. Critical thinking and Problem Solving

Healthcare professionals face many critical situations where they need to use their intellect, creativity, confidence and logical reasoning to find out the solution. Critical thinking is an essential component in quality health care. Solving the problem can't be done only with knowledge but it requires experience too. Problem solving involves both analytical and creative skills which vary with the nature of the problem.

The various factors to be considered in Problem solving are

- Analytical Ability
- Lateral Thinking
- Initiative
- Logical Reasoning
- Persistence

Analytical ability helps you to evaluate the problem and to make decisions. Lateral thinking will make you think outside the box. While making any decision, you need to take the responsibility of it. And Determination is the important criteria in solving the problem and making the decision.

Whatever the problem may be, the **IDEAL** model of problem-solving is

- **I**dentify the problem
- **D**efine the problem
- **E**xamine the options
- **A**ct on a plan
- **L**ook at the consequences

3. Team Work

Health care, by definition, is a multidisciplinary profession in which doctors, nurses, health professionals from different specialties must work together, communicate often, and share resources⁴. Also the more complex and specialized clinical care has forced the medical staff to work as a team. Teamwork and collaborative care helps to understand patient needs – especially in areas where social and health issues abound¹². For example, a program in India trains nurses working with HIV patients to work within many roles: counselor, lab technician and outreach worker⁵. The World Health Organization⁵ recommends that students begin using the principles of teamwork in their education immediately.



Health team is often made up of a variety of professionals each with specialized knowledge and specific responsibility.

Teamwork and team training is now seen as an essential part of medical education which will teach working together, sharing information, solving the problem as a team.

Team Work basically involves³

- Building a good rapport and effective working with others
- Good understanding
- Respect others
- taking responsibility of decisions

4. Time Management

Time management is a set of principles, practices, skills, tools, and systems that work together to help you get more value out of your time with the aim of improving the quality of your life.⁶

It is one of the most important skills one needs to acquire in order to be successful in this competitive world. Time is a precious resource and cannot be bought, saved, or stored. So managing the time has become important for productive and balanced life.⁷

Every day the health care professionals

face new challenges. As responsibilities increase, physicians must learn to re-evaluate and sharpen their skills required in handling the demands and constraints that impact on their time, practices, and lifestyle. Physicians must learn to become more proficient and effective. They must learn methods which effectively manage time to balance the needs of a personal and professional life⁸⁻¹⁴.

Following points will help in managing the time.¹⁵

- Advance planning
- Some flexibility in your schedule
- Use of any spare time wisely
- Staying organized is key in effective time management
- Say “no” to non-critical tasks.
- Reward Yourself.
- Should live a healthy lifestyle

Conclusion: Medical Profession is heavily invested in dealing with people and is different from other professions in that it deals with people when they're devoid of their normal state. Therefore, as healthcare professionals, it is prudent for us to learn various soft skills mentioned here to optimize patient care and professional satisfaction.

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