A Communication Skills Module:

WORKING WITH A TEAM

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IT TAKES A VILLAGE...

Being a member of a healthcare team is a unique situation that is not found in any other business industry.

This is because every healthcare team is made up of a variety of disciplines and personalities! It is this variety that makes the situation unique.

Healthcare teams require everyone to carry an equal share of the workload with the common goal of caring for the client.

Henry Ford said, “Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.”

Whether you work in a large facility with hundreds of other people or you spend your days in a private home with just one client, you are part of a healthcare team. The success of the team depends on how well all the team members work together.

As a member of a healthcare team, you are expected to:

- Understand your own job and how it fits into the team.
- Have a basic understanding of your coworkers’ jobs so you can all work together.
- Focus on how your actions affect the client and the team.

This inservice will help you by:

- Taking a look at the different types of personalities you may encounter on your team.
- Looking at your job as a nursing assistant and showing you how important your work is to the entire healthcare team.
- Describing the role of the many other disciplines who make up your healthcare team.
- Getting you to think about how your clients are affected by your work—and the work of your team.
It takes all types of people to make up a team. The following is a list of personality types you may see in yourself or your co-workers.

Keep in mind that these are generalizations . . . In truth, most people are a combination of these types and may even change types in different situations.

**POSITIVE TEAM CONTRIBUTORS**

- **THE GIVER:** You enjoy providing assistance whenever and wherever it is needed. You teach the team new and better ways to do things and encourage the team to set high standards. Your team members see you as generous and dependable.

- **THE BUDDY:** You believe in the strength of the team. You know you can’t do it all alone. You believe in the mission of the team but can also be flexible and open to new ideas. You are always willing to pitch in and work outside of your defined role.

- **THE COMMUNICATOR:** You are a good listener. You know how to diffuse conflict and keep the team working in harmony. You know how to lift the spirits of your team members and make everyone feel good about their individual contributions. Most people see you as a positive people person.

- **THE CHALLENGER:** You are not afraid to question protocol, policies and procedures. You are willing to disagree with the leadership and take risks when you believe something can be done more efficiently or cost effectively. Most people think you are brave and appreciate your openness.

Unfortunately, there may be some negative forces at work on your team, too. Negative forces can tear a team apart, causing a decline in morale and higher employee turnover.

Understanding these characteristics is important—so that you can learn to work with every personality type.

**NEGATIVE TEAM CONTRIBUTORS**

- **THE DRAMA QUEEN:** These people love to know the details of others’ lives and often have no problem discussing their own intimate details. They like to gossip and tend to give advice even when it is not requested.

- **THE BULLY:** This person likes to be in control. Bullies are strong, smart and get right to the point. When the Bully is angry about something . . . people know to stay out of her way or she will eat them for lunch! Unlike the bully on the playground, this person would never resort to physical abuse in the workplace, but may say hurtful things to injure people.

- **THE COUCH POTATO:** These types tend to get bored quickly and are not really interested in their job. Couch Potatoes wish life had a remote control so they could just change the channel to something more exciting. Couch Potatoes tend to do only the absolute minimum and don’t like to pay attention to details. As a result, their work may be somewhat sloppy.

Grab your favorite highlighter! As you read through this inservice, highlight five things you learn that you didn’t know before. Share this new information with your supervisor and co-workers!
MEMBERS OF THE HEALTHCARE TEAM

THE PHYSICIAN: Most physicians specialize in a certain area of medicine like cancer, orthopedics or pediatrics. About a third will practice as primary care physicians (PCP), also called general or family physicians. Some typical things a PCP will do are:

- Regular check ups to make sure people are staying well.
- Ordering and performing tests to diagnose medical problems.
- Prescribing medications as needed.
- Treating a variety of illnesses. (If patients develop problems that require the skills of a certain “expert”, primary care physicians usually refer their patients to specialists.
- Performing follow up care to make sure the treatments or medications they ordered have helped the patient.

How You Can Help: Encourage your clients to follow the treatment plan ordered by their physician.

Remind your clients to take medications on time and to follow the doctor's orders.

Make sure you report any changes you notice in your client's day-to-day condition. The physician may need to make changes in the client's treatment plan. Your input is important!

THE PHARMACIST: Pharmacists fill the prescriptions ordered by physicians and other healthcare professionals. You will find pharmacists in drug stores, hospitals, clinics and other healthcare facilities. All pharmacists have completed a special educational program and licensing exam that allows them to:

- Advise physicians on the selection, dose and side effects of medications.
- Mix ingredients, if necessary, to make up the prescribed medications (although most medications come “ready-made” from the drug companies).
- Counsel people on the medications that have been prescribed for them...and for medications that people buy over-the-counter.
- Give advice on medical equipment and home health supplies.

How You Can Help: Follow your workplace policy for assisting your clients with their medications. In most states, nursing assistants can remind their clients to take their medicine, but they can’t open the bottle and give them the drug. Be sure you know what you’re allowed—and not allowed—to do!

If clients ask you questions about their medications, tell your supervisor or suggest that the clients ask the pharmacist.

Let your supervisor know if your clients run out of medication or if they aren’t taking their meds on schedule.

WHAT excites YOU?

YOU ARE THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER (CEO)

YOU are responsible for YOU: Sure, you work as part of a team. However, the decisions you make, the care you give, the things you say, and the attitude you project are all personal decisions you have to make every day.

You are the CEO: Think of your life as your own personal corporate empire, and you are the CEO. In order to successfully run the empire, the CEO must manage production.

You are the product: Your personality and your skills are your personal product. Do you want your product to be tossed on the shelf at the “Dollar Store,” or does your product belong in a nice store, with clean isles, soothing music and soft lighting?

- If you think your product deserves better than the bargain bin, then pick it up, dust it off, and make it better!

Polish your personality: If you work with a difficult team that seems bogged down by negativity and gossip, then be the leader they need. Set the example and they will follow you.

You are responsible for you! No excuses. Don’t just “do your best.” Do better. You know you can!
MEMBERS OF THE HEALTHCARE TEAM - CONTINUED

THE ADMINISTRATORS: An administrator is a business manager. And, every business needs good managers to keep it running smoothly. Some administrators have business degrees, while others are nurses or other healthcare professionals who have moved into management jobs. Your workplace may have one administrator or there may be several.

Administrators make day-to-day decisions about:
- Keeping workplace policies and procedures current.
- Spending and saving the company’s money in the best way.
- Hiring and managing employees.
- Keeping client medical records safe and confidential.

How You Can Help: Administrators enjoy employees who are creative and who like to solve problems. If you have an idea that you think will improve your workplace, let your administrator know. Just make sure you talk about your solution to a workplace problem...not just the problem!

Ask your supervisor how you should communicate with your administrator. Should you make an appointment? Is there an “open door” policy? Can you speak up during staff meetings?

THE REGISTERED NURSE (RN): RNs work to promote health, prevent disease and help clients cope with illness. Some RNs provide “bedside” care—treating clients and carrying out physician orders. Other RNs manage the nursing care of a number of clients by directing the work of other healthcare professionals. The tasks that RNs are allowed to do are regulated by each state’s Board of Nursing.

The registered nurses at your workplace may have many responsibilities, including:
- Assisting physicians during treatments and examinations.
- Assessing the physical and emotional needs of clients.
- Developing and managing a nursing care plan for each client.
- Administering medications.
- Taking care of wounds.
- Drawing blood for lab work and starting IV’s.
- Supervising licensed practical nurses and nursing assistants.
- Conducting inservices for their fellow employees.

How You Can Help: Be sure you are clear about what the RN expects from you. If you have questions, don’t be shy. ASK!

Remember: RNs are responsible for keeping each client’s plan of care up-to-date. They need your input. Be sure to tell them when you notice changes—good or bad—during your daily work with your clients.

THINK about it!

- We hear so much about the damage a bully can do in schools. Children are threatened, teased, and physically and mentally assaulted. It has become such a problem that most schools now have a “zero tolerance” policy in place to stop this aggressive behavior before it becomes dangerous.
- You would think that as children grow up and become productive adults, the bullying behavior would stop. Unfortunately, this is not the case.
- In fact, gossip and bullying behavior among healthcare workers has become such a big problem that the Joint Commission now requires all healthcare employers to have a policy in place to address the issue before it becomes a problem.
- Do you know your workplace policy on bullying and gossip? If not, ask your supervisor about the policy today.

1. **Do you have any special tactics for dealing with bullying and gossip?**
2. **Share your experiences and ideas with your co-workers and find out how they handle these situations.**
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MEMBERS OF THE HEALTHCARE TEAM - CONTINUED

THE LICENSED PRACTICAL NURSE (LPN OR LVN): LPNs care for clients under the direction of physicians and RNs. Each state’s Board of Nursing determines which tasks LPNs are allowed to perform. Some states require the RN to develop and manage a client’s plan of care, but an LPN can carry out the plan. (For example, the RN decides Mr. Brown needs to learn more about preventing constipation. The LPN teaches Mr. Brown and reports back to the RN about how well Mr. Brown learned the information.)

Other responsibilities of the LPN may include:
- Providing basic “bedside” care.
- Administering medications
- Applying dressings.
- Observing clients and reporting changes.
- Helping clients with personal care.
- Supervising nursing assistants.

How You Can Help: REMEMBER...each state has different laws about what LPNs may do. Your supervisor might be either an LPN or an RN. But don’t worry if you can’t tell the difference between an RN and an LPN! They are both dedicated nurses.

THE PHYSICAL THERAPIST (PT): PTs help people regain their physical strength after an accident or illness. They work with people of all ages who have muscle, nerve, joint or bone diseases.

Sometimes, PTs work to get people back to the same physical level they used to be. Other times, they work to help people accept and live with a disability.

The treatments performed by physical therapists include:
- Helping clients with strength exercises and endurance training.
- Working with clients on their coordination and range of motion.
- Instructing clients how to ambulate and perform daily activities.
- Instructing clients how to use assistive devices like prosthetic limbs, crutches and walkers.
- Helping clients with pain control by means of hot and cold treatments, traction, ultrasound and electrical stimulation.

How You Can Help: Remember, you spend much more time with each client than the PT does. So, be sure to tell the PT how your client is getting along between sessions.

Ask the physical therapists at your workplace how you can help your clients be as independent as possible.

Be sure you support the exercise program that the physical therapist has set up for your client. Let them know if you need instruction on any of the exercises.

GO ON A TREASURE HUNT

To be a good team member, you need to know who the key players are! And, it’s nice to have a name and a way to contact your team members when you need them.

Go on a treasure hunt and find as much of the following information you can. (If none exists, then leave it blank.)

Your Supervisor’s name and contact info (phone # or email):
_________________________________
_________________________________

Your workplace’s Physical Therapist name and contact info:
_________________________________
_________________________________

Your workplace’s Social Worker name and contact info:
_________________________________
_________________________________

Your Human Resources Administrator name and contact info:
_________________________________

Ask your supervisor for a company directory. That way, when you need your team members—you’ll know how to find them!
A group becomes a team when each member is sure enough of himself and his contribution to praise the skills of the others.

~Norman Shidle

MEMBERS OF THE HEALTHCARE TEAM - CONTINUED

THE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST (OT): OTs work with people to improve their ability to perform daily activities at work and at home. Their goal is to help clients regain, recover or maintain their daily living skills.

The treatments that occupational therapists perform include:

- Teaching clients new or different ways to accomplish daily tasks like dressing, cooking and eating.
- Helping people gain strength through special physical exercises.
- Improving a client’s manual dexterity and hand-eye coordination.
- Teaching people how to improve memory skills—especially for short term memory.
- Helping people adapt to—and cope with—new disabilities so that they lead satisfying, independent lives.

How You Can Help: Know the difference! A physical therapist usually works with large muscles and an occupational therapist usually works with small muscles. So, a PT would work with a client who has trouble walking...but an OT would work with a client who has trouble buttoning his shirt. If you keep this in mind, you’ll be able to discuss the needs of your clients with the therapists in your workplace.

THE SPEECH THERAPIST: Speech therapists, also called Speech-Language Pathologists or SLPs, work with clients who have trouble speaking or understanding language. They also help people who have problems with the muscles in their mouth and throat.

Speech and language problems can be caused by hearing loss, brain injury, cerebral palsy, a stroke, cleft palate, mental retardation or emotional problems. Often, the SLPs goal is to help clients improve their communication skills.

The treatments performed by speech therapists include:

- Giving written and oral tests to assess the extent of the client’s communication problem.
- Using special tools to learn how well clients can communicate.
- Teaching clients with no speech abilities how to communicate with alphabet boards or computerized devices.
- Instructing clients how to use their mouth and throat muscles to improve their speech.
- Helping clients who have trouble swallowing so that they learn how to eat without choking.

How You Can Help: Report immediately if one of your clients has trouble speaking or swallowing. The client may need an SLP.

If your client is already working with an SLP, there may be special exercises that you can encourage between visits to improve symptoms.

CONDUCT AN INTERVIEW

Think about a member of your team whose job you find interesting. It could be the RN, the PT, OT, or even the Chaplain!

Request a few minutes of your team member’s time or meet for lunch and ask the following question:

1. Can you tell me more about your job and the things you do on a daily basis?
2. What education do you need for your job?
3. What are the best and worst things about your job?
4. What makes someone a good candidate for a job like this?
5. If I wanted to have a job like this, what would I need to do?

Now, share what you have learned with your co-workers!

“"A group becomes a team when each member is sure enough of himself and his contribution to praise the skills of the others.”"
A Communications Module: Working with a Team

MEMBERS OF THE HEALTHCARE TEAM -  CONTINUED

THE SOCIAL WORKER: Social workers help people with social problems such as financial distress, housing problems or abuse. The goal for social workers is to help clients function as best they can within their environment, to help solve their personal and family problems and to deal with family relationships.

Social workers help clients by:
- Providing direct counseling to clients and family members.
- Organizing support groups for clients with similar problems such as cancer, AIDS or Alzheimer's Disease.
- Suggesting resources for and ways to solve problems—especially any problems that may get in the way of the client getting well.
- Helping to manage personal and family crises.
- Arranging for support services that can help clients function better.

How You Can Help: Be sure to notify the social worker—or your supervisor—if your client has needs that aren’t being met. For example, tell the social worker if Mr. Smith can’t afford his medications, or if Mrs. Johnson has been crying every day since being diagnosed with cancer.

Remember that the social worker may be able to help family members too—especially if their problems affect the client’s health.

THE ACTIVITY DIRECTOR: If you work in a hospital or a skilled nursing facility, you may have activity directors on your healthcare team. These professionals may also be known as recreational therapists.

The goal of their work is to help clients have a better quality of life by socializing with others and participating in fun activities.

The duties of activity directors may include:
- Training people who volunteer to spend time with clients.
- Encouraging clients to socialize and develop hobbies—in spite of any chronic condition or illness they might have.
- Planning, organizing and directing activities for clients, such as: games, arts and crafts, exercises and holiday events.
- Preparing progress reports on clients about how they are responding to activities.

How You Can Help: If your workplace has an activity director, be sure to tell him/her about any activities you know your clients enjoy.

If your clients participate in activities, report how they react afterwards. Are they tired and anxious or relaxed and happy? Your feedback will help the activity director plan appropriate activities for your clients.

Help your clients stay as active as possible by encouraging them to participate in their own personal care. Praise them when they brush their own hair or put on their own shoes.

Key Points to Remember

1. You are required to know who all the members of your healthcare team are—and what they do.
2. The entire team works toward the common goal of CARING FOR THE CLIENT!
3. No matter what area of healthcare you work in, being a good team member will be your best asset.
4. Be a team member others can count on. Set the example and others will follow your lead.
5. Speak up! If you have an idea that will improve your client’s outcome, tell someone! Your ideas matter because you are an important member of the team!

“The welfare of each is bound up in the welfare of all.”
~ Helen Keller
A Communications Module: Working with a Team

MEMBERS OF THE HEALTHCARE TEAM - CONTINUED

THE NURSING ASSISTANT: You work hard and your clients need you. In fact, the entire healthcare team relies on you. Administrators admit that their workplace would fall apart in a very short time without you...the nursing assistants!

To be the best team player you can, keep these few things in mind:

Pull your own weight: Everyone on the team has the same goal—to improve the client’s health and quality of life. However, each member of the team has his or her own responsibilities to help meet this goal. No other team members should expect you to do their job—and you shouldn’t expect anyone else to do yours.

Stay flexible: Be ready for change! Your assignment may change from day to day or even from hour to hour. And, when someone asks you to help with a task that’s not one of your regular duties, try to avoid saying, “That’s not my job.”

Plan your work: At the beginning of your work day, think about the tasks you need to accomplish. Making lists can be a handy way to keep yourself organized.

Manage your time: The more organized you are, the better chance you have of completing all your work on time. This means less stress for you—and for the team.

OTHER TEAM MEMBERS: Depending on where you work, there may be even more members of your healthcare team. You may see:

- Respiratory Therapists: Manage oxygen and life support therapy and help clients with various breathing difficulties.
- Nutritionists and Dieticians: Help meet people’s nutritional needs, plan meals and oversee a client’s prescribed diet.
- Therapy Assistants: Assist (and are supervised by) physical and occupational therapists.
- Physician Assistants: Treat clients, working under the supervision of physicians.
- Nurse Practitioners: Have specialized education that allows them to treat clients and prescribe certain medications (under the supervision of a physician).
- Lab and IV Specialists: Draw blood and start IV’s.
- Psychiatric Aides: Help care for mentally impaired or emotionally disturbed individuals.
- Chaplains: Provide spiritual guidance and comfort.
- Bereavement Counselors: Work with hospice patients and especially their families to help them cope with the loss of their loved one.

MEMBERS OF THE HEALTHCARE TEAM - CONTINUED

THE NEXT step!

Apply what you’ve learned!

RATE YOURSELF!

Now that you know all about your team ... and you know what makes a great team ... apply what you’ve learned to your own team contributions!

Look on page 2 of this packet and identify your personality. Which one (or more) are you?

____________________________
____________________________
____________________________

What contributions have you made to the health of your client?

____________________________
____________________________
____________________________

What contributions have you made for the good of your TEAM?

____________________________
____________________________
____________________________

If you can’t answer the last question, think about what you can do in the future to make a positive contribution to your team!
MEMBERS OF THE HEALTHCARE TEAM - CONTINUED

THE CLIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES: The most important member of the healthcare team is the client. Picture your client in the middle of a circle with all your coworkers and you around the edge, working on the same goal: to help the client meet his or her healthcare needs.

- Your clients are not just sitting there waiting for everyone to take care of them! Clients are active members of the team and should participate in their own care as much as possible.
- Your clients are entitled to help plan their own care—to make decisions about what kind of treatments and daily care they want. This means they also have the right to refuse treatment or to refuse to help with their daily care.
- Remember that at first you are a stranger to the client. It takes time for the two of you to get to know each other and to get into a routine.
- Each client’s family also plays a role in the healthcare team by supporting their loved one. Make an effort to get to know family members. They can help you understand your client better.
- Be honest with your clients. If they ask you questions, be truthful. And, if you don’t know the answer, it’s okay to say, "I don’t know." (You can try to find out by talking to your team members. For example, if Mr. Greene asks you how long he’ll have to wear the brace on his leg, don’t just guess. Tell him you’ll find out. Then, ask the nurse or the physical therapist for the right answer.)
- It’s very important that your clients and their families understand what you are—and aren’t—allowed to do. Be sure to communicate your assignment clearly to them.
- Respect your client’s moods. Everyone reacts differently to being ill or to dealing with a disability. It’s your job to have a positive attitude at all times, and to support your clients even when they act sad or grumpy.
- Try to give your clients as much control over their lives as possible. Think of how you would feel in their place if everyone told you when to sleep, when to eat and when to walk. Give your clients a choice whenever possible.
- Clients have the right to expect quality care from every member of the healthcare team.
- Remember…the client is the “boss”. Without clients, none of us in healthcare would have a job!

GET OUT!

Thinking outside the box!

Working with clients in the home often requires coming up with creative solutions to uncommon problems.

- THE PROBLEM: You are caring for a 72 year old woman who recently became confined to a wheelchair. She is adjusting well and has moved back into her home where she lives alone with her pet cat.
- When you arrive at her home today you find her in the kitchen with quite a mess! She is trying to bake cookies for her granddaughter who is coming to visit.
- WHAT YOU KNOW: You offer to help but she insists she is the only one who can make these cookies just right.
- Which type of therapist would be able to best help her re-learn how to bake cookies under these new circumstances?
- GET CREATIVE: Think of 3 creative solutions you might suggest to your client right now to help her get the cookies made while still allowing her the independence she needs.
- TALK ABOUT IT: Share your ideas with your co-workers and supervisor and find out how they would solve the problem.
COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR HEALTHCARE TEAMS

- **Be kind to each other.** Remember that working with sick or aging people can be emotionally exhausting. It can be very frustrating to work hard every day and see no improvement in your clients—or even see them getting worse. Support your coworkers...and let them support you!

- **Avoid the drama!** Unfortunately, it seems that when humans get together in groups, gossiping and talking behind other people’s backs is common. Keep in mind that this is very destructive behavior! Try to keep your personal feelings about other members of the team to yourself, and refuse to listen to gossip. You’ll have a healthier team and a happier workplace!

- **It’s not about you!** Never forget that the client is a member of the healthcare team and that the client’s needs are the main focus of the entire team! Be sure you (or the other team members) have talked to the client/family about the client’s healthcare goals.

- **Hold that thought!** Never say anything negative about another team member, especially to a client. For example, during her bath, Mrs. Miller says to her aide, Roberta, “Oh, that nurse, Sylvia...she’s mean. She’s always telling me what to do.” If Roberta says, “You’re right, Mrs. Miller. Sylvia can really be a witch!” what do you think that will do to Mrs. Miller’s relationship with her nurse? Even if Roberta dislikes Sylvia, she should support her work with the client and say something like, “Mrs. Miller, you must get tired of all of us coming in and out of your room. But, we all want to help you get better.”

- **Be sensitive AND efficient!** People who choose to work in healthcare are often sensitive to the needs of others. They are expected to be warm and caring people. Yet at the same time, they are expected never to make a mistake and to work as tirelessly as a machine. It’s a lot to ask of people—to be kind and sensitive and still get all the work done quickly! But, this is the goal for every healthcare worker. Help your team members by encouraging them to talk to you when they are stressed and by being willing to share your feelings with them. No one knows better what the stresses of your job are than the other members of your healthcare team!

- **Pay attention to details!** A detail that may seem minor to you may be crucial to another member of the team. (It could even be a life-or-death issue for a client.) For example, you may think that when Mr. Edwards complains about being dizzy, he’s just “talking crazy” again so you don’t report it. But it’s an important detail for the entire team to know. The nurse and the physician can try to find out the cause of the dizziness; the physical therapist will know to be careful during his therapy sessions with Mr. Edwards; and the social worker might want to arrange for extra help for the client. So even if a detail doesn’t seem important to you, be sure to communicate it to your team!
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TIPS FOR WORKING WITH A TEAM

- **Plan and prepare!** Think about how the other team members fit into your client’s day. For example, it’s now 9 a.m. You know that Mr. Simmons has a physical therapy session scheduled at 9:30. If you rush Mr. Simmons through his bath so that he’s ready by 9:30, he’ll be so tired that he won’t be able to participate in his therapy session. Instead, you choose to let Mr. Simmons rest and plan to help him with his bath *after* the therapy session.

- **You’re not alone!** Remember that every team member works very hard. For example, physical therapists—like you—spend a lot of time on their feet, lifting and transferring clients.

- **Know your scope of practice!** Don’t ever perform a task that you know is beyond your training—no matter who asks you to do it! For example, let’s say your supervisor is a registered nurse and she asks you to change the sterile dressing on Mr. Tucker’s chest wound—just this once. You know it’s against regulations but you want to make your supervisor happy. *Don’t do it!* You could lose your job, as well as your ability to work as a nursing assistant.

- **Ask for more training!** In your daily work, you may be asked to use unfamiliar equipment. Ask your supervisor which team member can show you how it works. For example, Mary has been assigned to a client who is transferred with a Hoyer lift. Mary has only used a Hoyer lift once and is afraid she might hurt the client. Her supervisor tells her that Bill, the physical therapist, is an expert on Hoyer lifts. Mary asks him to show her how to use it and now she transfers her client with ease!

- **Find a role model!** Use your observation skills to watch your coworkers as they go about their daily job. You can learn a lot from watching others.

- **Get with the program!** Think about how your actions affect everyone else on the team. For example, let’s say the team has a goal for your client, Mrs. Jones, of improving the strength in her arms. The occupational therapist works with Mrs. Jones every day. At the same time, if you do everything for Mrs. Jones—wash and brush her hair, dress her, etc.—she’ll *never* reach her goal and your healthcare team will have failed.

- **Know what you’re working toward!** Be sure you understand the healthcare goals for each of your clients. For example, the goal for Mr. Brown may be to help him get back to normal after hip surgery. The goal for Mrs. Newman may be to keep her from losing any strength in her muscles. And the goal for Mr. Sanders may be to help him die with as much comfort and dignity as possible. Each of your clients will have different needs and different goals. This affects how you go about your work with each client.

- **Speak up!** When talking with team members, offer solutions not just problems. Your team will benefit from your creative ideas and your ability to solve problems. Don’t be shy about offering your opinion about how to make things better for your clients. You may be able to suggest solutions no one else would have thought of because you work so closely with the client.
TIPS FOR WORKING WITH A TEAM – CONTINUED

- **If it isn’t documented, it didn’t happen!** Your team may meet together as a group, especially if you are a home health aide. Or you may only see each other in passing. In either case, documentation is the main way that team members share information. Be sure to complete your documentation on time and according to your workplace policies. This helps your team members stay informed about your client’s progress.

- **Learn the lingo!** Every discipline has a certain way of talking in “shorthand” about a client. For example, a nurse might say to you, “Tell me if Mrs. Wilson asks for any of her PRN meds or if she complains of SOB.” Or, a therapist might ask you, “How is Mr. Kelly doing with his ADL’s? Is he moving his UE’s?” If members of your healthcare team say anything you don’t understand, be sure to ask what it means. They are probably so used to using certain abbreviations that they forget that everybody doesn’t talk like that! (By the way, in the above examples, “PRN meds” are medications that are taken only as needed—not on a regular schedule. “SOB” stands for shortness of breath. “ADL’s” are Activities of Daily Living—things like bathing, toileting, and dressing. “UE’s” are the upper extremities or the arms.)

- **It’s like football!** Think about other kinds of teams and how important it is for everyone on the team to contribute. For example, if a football team has a quarterback who comes late to practice, doesn’t like to run and keeps on fumbling the ball, his team probably won’t win many games. Or, they may win some games, but only if the rest of the team works twice as hard to make up for his poor performance. It’s the same for healthcare teams. Each member of the team either adds to the quality of client care by working hard or takes away from it by performing poorly on the job. Set a great example for your team by always trying to do your best!

- **It takes a whole team!** Remember that studies have shown that client care improves when team members work together. Your clients are depending on you to work together with your healthcare team. And, when you work together as a team, you can all feel satisfaction from the positive changes you make in a client’s life.

Don’t forget to give yourself credit for a job well done!