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Column: Developing Health Care Quality and Patient Safety Linchpins through Interprofessional Education

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Advancing Health Care Quality and Safety through Interprofessional Education

This column is the first in a series of discussions about improving Health Care Quality and Safety through interprofessional education.

Developing Health Care Quality and Patient Safety Linchpins Through Interprofessional Education

Mary Lou Manning

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Every organization needs linchpins...artists, with a genius for finding a new answer, a new connection, or a new way of getting things done.

- Seth Godin, *Linchpin, Are You Indispensable?*

Seth Godin pens provocative books with witty titles such as *Unleashing the Ideavirus*¹ and *Tribes*.² His most recent book, *Linchpin, Are You Indispensable?*³ is about the art of connection, the art of being human and the art of making a huge difference. Health care clinicians, faculty and students are well advised to read his work as they strive to master the art of meaningful interprofessional connections, so that together, they can make huge strides to improve health care quality and patient safety.

In December 1999, the modern day patient safety movement was born with the Institute of Medicine (IOM) report on medical errors, *To Err Is Human: Building a Safer Health Care System*.⁴ Two years later the IOM released *Crossing the Quality Chasm: A New Health System for the 21st Century*⁵ calling for improvements in six dimensions of health care performance and providing a framework for the redesign of the U.S. health care system. Both reports emphasized the importance of patient-centered care provided by effective interdisciplinary teams in creating an organizational safety culture.

Over the past decade, mounting political and social pressures, coupled with regulatory and accreditation standards, measures and mandates created compelling incentives for health care organizations to invest significant resources in health care quality and patient safety education. Initiatives focused on development of interprofessional competencies related to teamwork and collaboration, systems thinking, continuous process improvement, implementation science, and practice based on evidence and outcomes. As a result, health care quality and patient safety linchpins have emerged throughout health care organizations across the country.

In contrast, health professions education is mostly protected from the turbulence that our clinical partners are experiencing, and remains relatively insular and isolated.⁶ While the 2003 IOM report, *Health Professions Education, A Bridge to Quality*⁷ proposed a set of five core competencies that should serve as overarching educational goals for all health professions education, curricular integration and dedicated patient safety education continues to be a rare component within health care education.⁸ Additionally, most faculty have modest experience in improvement work and most often those who excel in the science and scholarship of quality improvement have largely been motivated by individual professional interests.⁹ Consequently, preparation of new health professionals expert in quality and safety has lagged behind the development of those in clinical practice, creating a gap for entry into practice.

The days are fading when health professions education can focus solely on the development of individual practitioners able to deliver quality care within their designated discipline. The emerging paradigm is for students to gain the knowledge, skills and attitudes to understand and value the perspectives and responsibilities of others, as related to improving systems that affect their ability to provide that care, together. To promote learning, academic institutions and their associated clinical facilities must encourage and invite interdisciplinary groups of students to participate in workplace-based experiences to learn about quality, patient safety and systems improvement. Concurrently, health professions teachers must harness the curiosity, energy and passion of those embarking on their health care careers, and help them become linchpins - indispensable health care professionals, working together, who can invent, connect, create and make things happen, to realize the vision of a health care system free of patient harm.

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