Train future physicians to lead interprofessional care teams

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The process of educating future physicians on the dynamics of interprofessional teams should include training on the leadership role physicians play on the team, new AMA policy states.

As health care systems become more complex, a knowledge of the workings of interprofessional teams is a key tenet to creating a physician equipped for the modern care environment. Newly adopted AMA policy calls on that education to include a focus on the skills necessary to be a physician leader in team care.

In a typical three-day hospital stay, a patient and family may interact with as many as 30 health professionals from a variety of disciplines, so teamwork is crucial to optimizing patient care. With nonphysician providers also part of the care team, the leadership dynamics on teams becomes murky, says an AMA Council on Medical Education report presented at the 2023 AMA Annual Meeting in Chicago.

The physicians’ defined role as leader of the health care team—a privilege earned through having the most intensive education and evaluation—is central to achieving optimal health outcomes.

“Reinforcing the principle that interprofessional teams in education and practice are led by physicians is within the scope of the AMA and is a key element of its work to protect patients,” says the council’s report. “If preparation for physician practice does not include leadership of teams as a component, then this element should be incorporated into medical education.”

To sharpen those leadership skills and help protect the physician’s role on the health care team, the AMA House of Delegates (HOD) adopted policy to encourage appropriate medical education accreditation organizations in allopathic and osteopathic medicine, including the Liaison Committee on Medical Education, Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation, American Osteopathic Association, and Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, to:

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• Incorporate the phrase “physician-led” as a modifier for “interprofessional education” into their relevant medical education accreditation standards, where appropriate.
• Require education in and evaluation of competency in physician-led interprofessional health care team leadership as part of the systems-based practice competency in medical education accreditation standards.

Delegates also adopted policy to “encourage medical educators to study how interprofessional learning and teamwork promote the development of physician leadership in team-based care.”

In addition, the HOD modified existing policy to:

• Support the concept that medical education should prepare students for practice in, and leadership of, physician-led interprofessional health care teams.
• Encourage medical standards-setting organizations, including the American Board of Medical Specialties and its member boards, to inform policymakers of the standards physicians are held to for independent practice in order to protect patients and that these standards make physicians the appropriate leaders of the interprofessional health care team.

Patients deserve care led by physicians—the most highly educated, trained and skilled health professionals. As part of the AMA Recovery Plan for America’s Physicians, the AMA vigorously defends the practice of medicine against scope-of-practice expansions that threaten patient safety.

Read about the other highlights from the 2023 AMA Annual Meeting.