

Physician-led team-based care

Achieving the *triple aim* of providing the highest quality care at the lowest cost possible while improving patient outcomes is becoming more difficult as the population ages, chronic conditions become more prevalent and newly-insured patients enter the health care system. Physician-led team-based care can help achieve these goals and is consistent with the American Medical Association's long-term strategic effort to shape innovative payment and delivery models, prepare future physicians to work in interprofessional teams and improve health outcomes.

Physician-led teams

The AMA defines the term "physician-led" in the context of team-based care as the consistent use by a physician of the leadership knowledge, skills and expertise necessary to identify, engage and elicit from each team member the unique set of contributions needed to help patients achieve their care goals.

The AMA believes that the appropriate ratio of physician to non-physician practitioners should be determined by physicians at the practice level—consistent with good medical practice, and state law where relevant—taking into consideration the physician's specialty, the physician's panel size and disease burden of the patient case mix.

Team-based care

Due to the complexity of the health care delivery system, many health care professionals find independent practice to be increasingly difficult to maintain. Team-based health care consists of an interdisciplinary group of health care providers collaborating to deliver health care to patients and relies on all professionals in the team. Depending on the specific practice needs, a team-based approach can include various combinations of physicians, nurses, physician assistants, pharmacists, social workers, case managers and other health care professionals. The unique strengths and perspectives of each provider are an asset when providing the safest, best possible care to patients. Physician-led team-based care is being implemented in physician practices and by some of

the nation's leading health care systems. The AMA believes that team-based health care should include:

- A physician-led team of at least two health care professionals
- Collaboration among team members, the patient and family
- Shared goals within and across health care settings
- Coordinated, high-quality, patient-centered care

Interdependent teamwork

In a physician-led team-based environment, the physician leader should be empowered to perform the full range of medical interventions that she or he is trained and licensed to perform. All other members of a physician-led health care team should be enabled to perform medical interventions that they are capable of performing according to their education, training, licensure and at the discretion of the physician team leader in order to most effectively provide quality patient care. Only when each practitioner, including the physician team leader, is practicing according to these demonstrated competencies can the team provide the highest quality care. The focus is on what the team can achieve together rather than what each individual practitioner can accomplish independently.

Physician expertise

Physician expertise is widely recognized as integral to quality medical care in the United States. With seven years or more of postgraduate education and an average of 10,000 hours of clinical experience through training, physicians are the natural leaders in the overall delivery of health care. Measurable differences exist between physician and non-physician providers regarding their unique training, experience, broad-based knowledge, ability and expertise. These varied backgrounds enhance the provision of team-based care.

Physicians should maintain authority for patient care in any team care arrangement to assure patient safety and quality of care, since the ultimate responsibility for each individual patient's medical care rests with the physician. In addition, physicians must be responsible

and have authority for initiating and implementing quality-control programs for non-physicians delivering medical care in team-based practices.

Physician leaders

Some physicians have been practicing in a physician-led team-based environment for decades, but for others team-based care poses a new way of practicing medicine and involves increased responsibility. The AMA has established the following principles to guide physician leaders when they are interacting with members of health care teams:

Patient-focused care

- Focus the team on patient- and family-centered care
- Collaborate with team members to provide quality patient care
- Identify to patients the roles and responsibilities of team members
- Manage efficient, effective and transparent care transitions by the team
- Support open communication among the patient, family and team members

Teamwork

- Make clear the team's mission, vision and values
- Expect team members' adherence to best practice protocols
- Foster a respectful team culture and facilitate the work of the team
- Promote clinical collaboration, coordination and communication within the team
- Encourage the sharing of professional insights, information and resources from team members

Clinical roles and responsibilities

- Review relevant measures of population health
- Review team members' clinical work and documentation
- Be accountable for clinical care, quality improvement, efficiency of care and continuing education

The future of team-based care

Due to the combined impact of health care budgetary constraints, the increase in health insurance coverage for millions of Americans as a result of the Affordable Care Act, and shortages of both physicians and nurses for the foreseeable future, support for physician-led team-based care is gaining momentum.

Numerous analyses of the health care system in the United States call for greater integration of care to more effectively and efficiently provide health care to the nation's growing, aging and increasingly sicker population. Physician-led team-based care has proven to be a successful integrated delivery model by improving access to patient-centered, quality-focused and cost-effective health care.

To learn more about this topic, view the AMA Council on Medical Service Report "[The Structure and Function of Interprofessional Health Care Teams](#)." Visit ama-assn.org/go/physicianledteams to view additional documents in the AMA's team-based care series.