Interprofessional Working for Health and Social Care

Community Health Care Series

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Interprofessional Working for Health and Social Care

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Interprofessional Working for Health and Social Care

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CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures</i>	vii
<i>List of Tables</i>	viii
<i>Foreword by Ainna Fawcett-Henesy</i>	ix
<i>Series Editor's Preface</i>	x
<i>List of Contributors</i>	xii

Introduction

John Øvretveit, Peter Mathias and Tony Thompson	1
 1. How to describe interprofessional working	
John Øvretveit	9
 2. Planning and managing interprofessional working and teams	
John Øvretveit	34
 3. Evaluating interprofessional working – a case example of a community mental health team	
John Øvretveit	53
 4. How patient power and client participation affects relations between professions	
John Øvretveit	79
 5. Preparation for interprofessional work: trends in education, training and the structure of qualifications in the United Kingdom	
Peter Mathias and Tony Thompson	103
 6. Preparation for interprofessional work: holism, integration and the purpose of training and education	
Peter Mathias, Ruth Prime and Tony Thompson	116
 7. The development of shared learning: conspiracy or constructive development?	
Jenny Weinstein	131
 8. The functional map of health and social care	
Lindsay Mitchell and Margaret Coats	157

9. Interprofessional collaboration: problems and prospects	
Simon Biggs	186
10. The World Health Organisation and European Union: occupational, vocational and health initiatives and their implications for cooperation amongst the professions	
Tony Thompson and Peter Mathias	201
<i>Index</i>	226

LIST OF FIGURES

1.1	A network meeting team	12
1.2	An integrated interprofessional team	13
1.3	Pathways for allocation or post-box teams	20
1.4	Pathways for reception-and-allocation teams	21
1.5	Pathways for reception-assessment-allocation teams	22
1.6	Pathways for reception-assessment-allocation-review teams	22
1.7	Pathways for hybrid teams	23
1.8	Profession-managed structure	29
1.9	Single-manager structure	29
1.10	Joint manager structure	30
1.11	Team manager-controlled structure	30
1.12	Hybrid management structure	31
2.1	Team operational policy as a framework for team development and management	42
3.1	Client pathways in an example community mental health team, combining day and profession-services	67
4.1	Participation and involvement, viewed in terms of responsibility and decision-making	89
4.2	Approaches to increasing participation:	92
7.1	The JPTI core curriculum module developed in April 1992	138
8.1	The care sector's main employers	159
8.2	The key purpose statement for all levels of work	174
8.3	The value domain	176
8.4	The provider roles of domains A and B	177
8.5	The knowledge and practice functions of domain C	177
8.6	The organisational function of domain D	178
8.7	All domains of the functional model	180

LIST OF TABLES

1.1	A ten-stage pathway mapping framework for describing a team's decision-making	19
3.1	A comparison against national averages	67
3.2	Options for increased interprofessional working	73
4.1	Approaches to increasing participation	
5.1	Organisations taking part in a conference in January 1993 on professional and occupational standards in the care sector	105
8.1	Summary of workforce numbers in the health and social care domain	160
8.2	The functional map: key purpose and first two tiers of analysis	181

FOREWORD

The importance of interprofessional, multiprofessional and intersectoral working has been a live topic for debate within health and social services for well over a quarter of a century. Enquiry after enquiry on child abuse has pointed the finger at health and social work professionals for their failure to work cooperatively and collaboratively together and, as a result of this sin of omission, for their potential contribution to the death of a child.

More recently, reports published following mental health tragedies have been fiercely critical of professionals for the very same reasons.

Several of the recent Government policy documents have been written with collaboration between professionals and agencies as their focus. In 1978, the World Health Organisation in the famous Alma Ata Declaration strongly advocated for multiprofessional and multisectoral working and went one step further, by suggesting that the public should also be involved at every stage of the planning of health care. In more recent years, the British Government, through its Patient's Charter initiative and Local Voices, gave thumbs up to the public becoming partners in caring.

So far, we have done well on the rhetoric and less well on the action. Progress on interprofessional working has been patchy in the extreme: true patient participation is a long way off.

The reasons for this lack of progress are sometimes difficult to define, as there is so little research into the area. This book is therefore *timely and opportune*, as it helps to throw some light on a difficult subject. The fact that it is written by three professionals – a nurse, an expert in social work and a psychologist – with an impressive number of years of grassroots experience behind them, makes it all the more valuable. The book attempts to uncover some of the myths about interprofessional working. Like all of us, the authors believe in the intrinsic value of professionals and their agencies working effectively together. Including the users of the services as partners is perceived as not only a *desirable* but an *essential* goal. However, the authors sensibly acknowledge that when professionals operate under different management structures, have different paymasters, abide by different ethical and professional codes and sometimes have different end goals, interprofessional working is extremely difficult, although not impossible.

Working within the new internal market of health and social care further compounds the problem.

The imbalance of power which exists between professionals and service users – ‘The professionals as a conspiracy against the laity’ theory thus militating against the ideal of professional partnerships – is also well explored.

The case example of a community health team in action paints an excellent picture of just how complex the task is. The same can be said for the chapter on shared learning, which is presented warts and all.

However, the book also offers some solutions. The first lesson relates to our need to focus on the needs of the service user and not on the professional. The second lesson concerns the importance of learning together, yet acknowledging that, although we may come through different routes to our chosen specialist areas, we should embrace diversity and build on the many areas where we share common ground and which require similar competencies. The third lesson is that effective interprofessional working will not happen without a lot of effort on the part of all concerned, and even then not all of those efforts will have positive outcomes for either the service users or professionals. The fourth lesson concerns the importance of broadening our horizons, not only multiprofessionally and multisectorally but also Europe-wide.

This book should have wide appeal to everyone and anyone tackling the world of seamless and integrated care. It will be of particular interest to those professionals working or preparing to work in the field of health and social care. Managers or education-alists associated with those areas will find the book a useful addition to their libraries.

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SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

Successive governments have indicated their commitment to enhancing the health of the nation and, in recent years, the focus of care delivery has shifted with escalating speed into the community. In so doing, it has become evident that community nurses and health visitors provide the focus for the promotion of health gain, and for the maintenance of positive health status for individuals, groups and local communities. Community nurses and health visitors are destined, therefore, to become leaders in the design, delivery and evaluation of effective health care interventions, informed by academic discovery, and advanced practice skills and competencies.

The changes that confront the contemporary community nursing practitioner are characterised by the diverse nature of the context within which community care is transacted, with an increasing emphasis on intersectoral co-operation, interprofessional collaboration, community action and development, and reduced reliance on the acute sector and residential care provision for longer-stay client groups.

The impact of change, pushed by a growing demand for flexible, high-quality services provided within local communities, will inevitably shape the NHS of the future. Resources have already been shifted to the community (although at a pace that is all too often criticised as being grossly inadequate to meet client need). Commissioners and providers are now required to demonstrate that the care they purchase and deliver is effective and responsive to the needs of local practice populations. To complement this, community nurses will be required to ensure that their activities make a significant impact on health gain for their practice population and, as such, must become seriously involved in structuring the political agenda that ultimately governs their practice environment.

In order for the community workforce to respond to these challenges, it will be necessary to ensure that community workers are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge base to be able to function effectively in the 'new world of community health practice'. Nurses will be required to develop and change, drawing upon the very best of their past experience, and becoming increasingly reliant upon the production of research evidence to inform their future practice.

This series is aimed at practising community nurses and health visitors, their students, managers, professional colleagues and com-

missioners. It has been designed to provide a broad-ranging synthesis and analysis of the major areas of community activity, and to challenge models of traditional practice. The texts have been designed specifically to appeal to a range of professional and academic disciplines. Each volume will integrate contemporary research, recent literature and practice examples relating to the effective delivery of health and social care in the community. Community nurses and health visitors are encouraged towards critical exploration and, if necessary, to change their own contribution to health care delivery – at the same time as extending the scope and boundaries of their own practice.

Authors and contributors have been carefully selected. Whether they are nurses or social scientists (or both), their commitment to the further development and enrichment of health science (and nursing as an academic discipline in particular) is unquestionable. The authors all demonstrate knowledge, experience and excellence in curriculum design, and share a commitment to excellence in service delivery. The result is a distillation of a range of contemporary themes, practice examples and recommendations that aim to extend the working environment for practising community nurses and health visitors and, in so doing, improve the health status of their local consumer populations.

Interprofessional Working for Health and Social Care has been written by a nurse, an expert in social work and a clinical psychologist – with contributions from other professionals. It provides community practitioners with the opportunity for critical examination of multi-professional teamwork in the workplace with clients, carers and other agencies. The authors pay particular attention to interprofessional working across organisational boundaries, especially between health and social services. Drawing from an extensive literature on multidisciplinary teamwork, the authors provide a useful resource, assisting nurses to enhance their teamwork skills with the aim of equipping them to work effectively in a range of settings in the community. The book is firmly set within the context of societal change and encourages readers to reduce reliance on interprofessional methods of staff training and professional development. As such, it provides practitioners with the source material required to assist them in the provision of a ‘seamless’ and comprehensive service to clients and their carers on a range of community settings.

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