

DOCTORS AS TEAM PLAYERS

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In the year 2000, the World Health Organization came up with a model for a health system based on 'six building blocks' namely:

1. good health services,
2. well performing health workforce,
3. a well functioning health information system,
4. accessibility to medical products and technologies,
5. a good health financing system. and
6. a greater need for strong leadership and governance from policy makers.

It encompasses all the activities whose primary purpose is to promote, restore, or maintain health. A system that should include patients and their families, health care workers and caregivers within organizations and communities, other sectors and stakeholders, and the health policy environment in which all health related activities occur.

In a hospital setting, this system therefore includes a lot of players such as administrators, ambulance drivers, porters, cleaners, x-ray staff, laboratory staff, pharmacy and nurses to name a few. In the midst of all these people is a group of medical doctors who are very much part of the team and who could not work alone without the support services provided by all the people mentioned above.

However not every health system is the same and each poses weaknesses and threats that could have a tremendous impact on how the medical officers perform their duties efficiently. Some of these challenges include:

- inadequate health financing that leads to short supply of medications, run down equipment and poorly paid staff
- an inadequate workforce to carry out the day-to-day operations and service delivery leading to the possibility of poorly organized teams with bad communication skills and styles, power struggles and personality conflicts

Nevertheless, these challenges could be seen not only as opportunities to trigger better planning and budget allocations to finance health but also for each medical officer to lead and be an important member of the team. The Samoa health sector response to the Novel H1N1 influenza pandemic of 2009 and the Tsunami disaster that devastated villages in the southeastern part of Upolu Island clearly illustrate the importance of the medical officers' role not only as a team player but very often they are called upon to be team leaders.

It again reminds us that:

1. Doctors shall consider every member of the team as an important and a valuable asset to the team organization
2. Doctors shall work with the team to demarcate each team member's responsibilities to avoid pointing fingers if matters arise
3. Doctors shall be an example of integrity and honesty, and therefore report mistakes and errors to improve patient safety
4. Doctors shall be a force behind good change and continuously lobbying to prioritize patient safety in every clinical setting.

I feel that we are seeing progress in the acute and long term care of patients in Samoa. We have a much clearer idea of what we need to do to improve teamwork within the health system.

Although policies and clinical standards are now in place to guide and monitor our clinical practice, the stakes and public expectations are high. The public are often misled to believe that the practice of medicine should be without errors and mistakes forgetting that doctors are also human beings. A doctor too has good and bad days. A doctor who may only have a two hours sleep the previous night, a doctor who may have not seen his or her own children and wife or husband for two straight days because of the demanding working hours.

In conclusion, I urge my colleagues to take heart and know your limitations because no doctor will know everything and no one knows how to relate to every patient and different situation. Try to make time to reflect on the day's work and try to draw a balance between work and the rest of the world around you. I urge my colleagues to consider others whom you work with with utmost respect and share your knowledge by teaching others what you know. One of the greatest joys I found of being a doctor is seeing my patients get better and go home with a thankful heart.

I wish the Samoa Medical Journal success and many more editions in the near future.