

# New teamwork model could improve patient health care

March 8 2021, by Amy McCaig

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Multiracial medical team having a discussion as they stand grouped together around a tablet computer on a stair well, overhead view. Credit: 123rf.com

Health care teams must prepare for anything, including the unconventional work environments brought about by a global pandemic and social unrest.

Open communication and trust are essential for successful teamwork in challenging health care situations, as detailed in "Building effective healthcare team development interventions in uncertain times: Tips for success." The paper was authored by researchers at Rice University, the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center and The Group for Organizational Effectiveness.

The study outlines a new model, developed at MD Anderson under the guidance of the researchers, with recommendations for health care [team effectiveness](#). It can be implemented in different settings to improve a team's communication, coordination and attitudes toward one another, improving clinical care and patient outcomes.

Team effectiveness is based on an organization's culture, leadership support and a trained and capable workforce, the researchers write. In addition, all [team members](#) should have clearly defined roles and purposes, with a clear team direction. But leaders must also consider the way a team feels, how it functions in the workplace and the way its members think. This is known in team science as the ABCs: attitudes, behaviors and cognitions.

By considering all these factors, the researchers suggest teams can achieve what they call "ideal team states," which include psychological safety (the freedom to speak openly without fear of negative job consequences), trust, adaptability and resilience.

"Only after embracing these states will teams be able to reach their highest potential," said Stephanie Zajac, a leadership practitioner at MD Anderson and the study's lead author.

The researchers also offer tips for successfully implementing team development interventions (TDIs), exercises used to advance team effectiveness. They recommend team leaders actively engage and invest

time in TDIs, and that the exercises be integrated with existing organizational efforts to support teams, such as individual leader and team coaching. Team leaders should also show care and concern for team members as they navigate these exercises together.

Finally, [leaders](#) are encouraged to communicate regularly with their employees, and reflect on and celebrate the progress they make.

As teams grow more diverse and face unexpected circumstances, including the health and social justice hurdles of the past year, these tips can make all the difference when running successful [health](#) care institutions, conducting [innovative research](#) and delivering high-quality and safe patient care, the researchers wrote.

**More information:** Stephanie Zajac et al. Building effective healthcare team development interventions in uncertain times: Tips for success, *Organizational Dynamics* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.orgdyn.2020.100824](#)

Provided by Rice University

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