

Conflict Management in Healthcare

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ABSTRACT

The conflict is a disagreement within oneself or differences or dispute among persons that has potential to cause harm. It is inevitable and may occur in any profession including healthcare. It could be among any group of healthcare professionals or healthcare team between different group of healthcare professionals or between patient and any of the member of healthcare team. The conflict has a critical effect on the competence, confidence, and morale of healthcare professionals. Consequently, it affects patient care too. To prevent or limit the conflict, emphasis must be focused on proper and impartial implementation of a professional code of conduct, ground rules and discipline. The sources of conflict could real or imagined differences in values, dissimilar goals among individuals, improper communication and personalization of generic or organizational issue. Generally, there are four types of conflicts, intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup and intergroup. The conflict usually goes through four phases, frustration of one or more parties involved in conflict, conceptualization or rationalization of cause, expression of behaviors and behaviors resulting in negative outcome. Thomas and Kilmann postulated a matrix explaining five distinct responses or styles to conflict resolution or management varying along the axis of assertiveness and cooperativeness. These five styles are avoiding, accommodating, compromising, competing and collaborating. The issue in conflict is not its existence, rather its management. When it is managed poorly, the outcome will be uncomplimentary with counterproductive results and if managed properly, it encourages competition, recognize legitimate differences and becomes powerful source of motivation.

Keywords: Conflict, healthcare, management of conflict, source of conflict, type of conflict.

INTRODUCTION

It is commonly well-known and acknowledged fact that human interactions and dealings have the potential to develop conflict. Studies has shown that most of these conflicts remains inadequately solved and some cases even unresolved. Conflicts are reality. They hamper the productivity of organization and wellbeing of individual involved but the conflicts are also beneficial for institution because they generate a healthy contest resulting into novel problem-solving approach and thereby efficiency and yield of the organization.¹⁻³

CONFLICT IN HEALTHCARE

The conflict is inevitable and happens to be in all aspects of life. The state of condition in healthcare is no different. The conflicts may be among doctors, among nurses, among staff, between doctors and nurses, between doctors and staff, between nurses and staff, among the health care team, between healthcare professionals and management or between healthcare professional or team and patient or patient's family; even conflict has been developed among healthcare research team, among public health care professionals and among teaching faculty members.^{1,4}

WHAT IS CONFLICT?

The conflict is a battle, contest or opposing forces existing between primitive desires and moral, religious or ethical ideas (Webster's Dictionary). The conflict is commonly defined as a disagreement within oneself or differences or dispute among or between persons that has potential to cause harm or in fact causes harm. The conflicts may vary from disagreements to major disputes that may lead to litigation or violence of rule of conduct.^{2,4}

EFFECTS OF CONFLICT

Conflicts have an unfavorable effect on efficiency, confidence, self-reliance, self-esteem and morale of healthcare professionals and in consequence patient care is adversely affected. The conflict may lead to higher healthcare professionals' turnover and undoubtedly limit their contributions and overall hamper efficiency and productivity of healthcare institute.^{2,4}

PREVENTION OF CONFLICT

Disagreement is said to be precursor of conflict, so prevention of conflict is mandatory. To prevent or limit the conflict, focus must be paid on proper and impartial implementation of a professional code of conduct,

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ground rules, disciplinary structure and mechanism and their understanding by all.¹

SOURCES AND TYPES OF CONFLICT

Despite all preventive measure, even then the conflict appears. For example, a mismatch in the expectations on the part of patient and family, and healthcare team. There are four general sources of conflict: 1) real or imagined differences in values, 2) dissimilar goals among individuals, 3) poor communication and 4) personalization of generic or organizational issue. There are four general types of conflicts: 1) intrapersonal, 2) interpersonal, intragroup and intergroup.⁵

PHASES OF CONFLICT

The impact of conflict and cost of conflict must be kept in mind. The conflict goes through at least four phases: first phase) frustration of one or more parties involved in conflict, second phase) conceptualization or rationalization of cause, third phase) expression of behaviors and fourth phase) behaviors resulting in destructive outcome. So, handling the conflict is of utmost importance. The conflict may not be the basically problematic but dealing the conflict may be problematical. The difficulties in handling the conflict may result in sadness, discontent and depression.^{2,6}

MANAGEMENT OF CONFLICT

Conflict resolution is defined in various ways, but each definition explains the importance of the existing interaction and its influence on subsequent interactions during predictable future conflict. The two eminent researchers of Game Theory and its role in studying interactions and managing conflict among groups or people received the 2005 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences.⁵

Thomas and Kilmann postulated a matrix elucidating five distinct responses (methods or modes, styles) to conflict resolution or management varying along the axes of assertiveness (the extent to which the person tries to satisfy his or her own concerns) and cooperativeness (the extent to which the person tries to satisfy the other person's concerns too). These five styles are: Avoiding, Accommodating, Compromising, Competing and Collaborating.^{3,5-7}

Avoiding: This is low assertiveness and low cooperativeness method. Neither persons' or groups' concerns are met (lose-lose situation). The purpose of this method is to delay or walk away.

Accommodating: This is low assertiveness and highly cooperativeness method. This is typically ignoring or neglecting one's own concerns to accommodate those of the others (win-win situation). It may be convenient for issues of little importance, or for creating good will

and demonstrating practicality. If abuse by others then poor outcome.

Compromising: This method is moderately assertiveness and cooperativeness. This involves negotiating or splitting any difference of opinion (lose-lose situation). The purpose is to find some middle path to exchange concessions due to time constraints.

Competing: This is highly assertiveness and little cooperativeness method. This method is one sided and generate fast effects (win-lose situation). This may be adopted when negotiation and bargaining is not a choice or the situation is unquestionably correct.

Collaborating: This is highly assertiveness and little cooperativeness method. This is ultimate methods to adopt when possible and in this generally both sides win (win-win situation). The purpose of this method is merge perspectives and to have a integrated solution resulting in increased commitment and improved relationship.

CONCLUSIONS

Conflict is unavoidable. It is a consequence of incompatible behavior and unmet expectations. The best way to manage conflict is to prevent it from happening, that is not an easy job. The problem with conflict is not its existence, but rather its management. When it is managed poorly, then outcome will be unfavorable with counterproductive results but when managed properly, then it stimulates competition, identify legitimate differences and become powerful source of stimulation.

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