

## Chapter 13

# Communication & Collaboration

### CHAPTER OVERVIEW

- **The Importance of Effective Communication and Collaboration Skills**
- **The Communication Process**
- **Strategies for Effective Communication**
- **The Importance of Team Work/Interprofessional Collaboration**
- **Stages of Team Development**
- **Effective Work Teams**
- **Chapter Summary**
- **Case Scenario**
- **Chapter Quiz**
- **References**

### The Importance of Effective Communication and Collaboration Skills

Communication may be defined as “the exchange of thoughts, messages, or information, as by speech, signals, writing, or behaviour”<sup>86</sup>. Communication is a two-way process that occurs through speaking, writing, listening, and observing as individuals share ideas, thoughts and feelings. The ability to communicate effectively is a foundational skill required by all professionals, including Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists. “Communication skills are second only to job knowledge in promoting workplace success.”<sup>87</sup> Communication with clients/patients and with colleagues or members of the interprofessional team for the purposes of collaboration on client-centred care is essential for optimal client/patient outcomes.

---

<sup>86</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition, Houghton Mifflin Company; 2006.

<sup>87</sup> Morgenstern, Julie, *Making Work Work*, Simon & Schuster, New York, NY; 2004, p. 209.

The Oxford Learner’s Dictionary defines collaboration as “the act of working with another person or group of people to create or produce something”<sup>88</sup>. Interprofessional Collaboration is defined by The Canadian Interprofessional Health Collaborative (CIHC) as “a partnership between a team of health providers and a client, in a participatory, collaborative and coordinated approach to shared decision-making around health and social issues”<sup>89</sup>. Excellent communication skills are essential for effective collaboration with clients and health care team members.

Professional Practice Standards outline the obligations for Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists regarding communication and collaboration in dietetic practice. The *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice* outline the entry to practices competencies related to Communication and Collaboration<sup>90</sup>:

### “3. Communication and Collaboration

Dietitians communicate effectively and collaborate with others to achieve practice goals:

- 3.01 Use appropriate communication approaches
- 3.02 Use effective written communication skills
- 3.03 Use effective oral communication skills
- 3.04 Use effective electronic communication skills
- 3.05 Use effective interpersonal skills
- 3.06 Engage in teamwork
- 3.07 Participate in collaborative practice”

The *Standards of Practice* of the College outline separate Standards for both communication and collaboration in ongoing dietetic practice as follows<sup>91</sup>:

#### “Standard 5. Communication

##### **Standard**

Registered Dietitians communicate effectively, respectfully, and in compliance with applicable legislative and regulatory requirements when providing professional services.

##### **Indicators**

To demonstrate this standard, Registered Dietitians will:

- a) Be clear and respectful in all verbal, nonverbal, and written communication.
- b) Maintain clients’ privacy and confidentiality in all forms of communication.

<sup>88</sup> Oxford University Press. *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary*. Retrieved March 18, 2021 at [https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american\\_english/collaboration](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/collaboration)

<sup>89</sup> Canadian Interprofessional Health Collaborative. A National Interprofessional Competency Framework. 2010. Retrieved March 17, 2021 from: <http://www.cihc-cpis.com/>

<sup>90</sup> Partnership for Dietetic Education and Practice. *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice*. (2020)

<sup>91</sup> College of Dietitians of Alberta. *Standards of Practice*. (2019)

- c) Use strategies to promote effective communication (e.g., active listening, empathy).
- d) Adapt communication to the needs of clients and minimize barriers by incorporating relevant supports as available (e.g., interpreters, visual aids, technology, appropriate language, culturally appropriate resources).
- e) Use strategies to facilitate clients' comprehension and learning (e.g., opportunity for questions, teach back, appropriate literacy levels).
- f) Communicate with professional integrity and maintain appropriate boundaries in all communication formats at all times.
- g) Document professional communications accurately and in a timely manner as required."

And:

***“Standard 4. Collaborative Practice***

**Standard**

Registered Dietitians partner with clients and team members in the collaborative and coordinated provision of professional services.

**Indicators**

To demonstrate this standard, Registered Dietitians will:

- a. Contribute professional knowledge to discussions and interactions with clients and team members.
- b. Clarify and explain their professional roles and responsibilities in discussions with clients and team members.
- c. Respect clients' and team members' perspectives and responsibilities, while acknowledging overlapping roles and scopes of practice.
- d. Consult with and/or refer as required, when the needs of clients may be more appropriately met by another Registered Dietitian or team member.
- e. Effectively manage conflict with clients and team members.
- f. Communicate clearly and respectfully with clients and team members, at all times to facilitate collaboration."

Excellent communication skills are fundamental to good dietetic practice. Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists who have good communication skills are able to carry out each of the following responsibilities in a more effective manner (1, 2):

- Conducting accurate assessments
- Implementing plans
- Providing information and education
- Facilitating desired outcomes

- Enhancing rapport and trust with others
- Preventing problems and complaints
- Resolving conflicts
- Improving effectiveness in all areas of practice

Good communication skills are also essential for the effective application of each of the concepts addressed in this handbook. Specifically, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists who have good communication skills are able to carry out each of the following responsibilities in a more effective manner (1, 2):

- Demonstrating professionalism
- Practicing in compliance with legislation, standards, and codes
- Meeting confidentiality and duty to report obligations
- Obtaining consent to treatment
- Applying principles of record keeping
- Avoiding conflicts of interest
- Establishing and maintaining professional boundaries

#### **KEY PRACTICE POINT**

**The ability to communicate effectively is a foundational skill required by all professionals, including Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists.**

As professionals, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists need to be acutely aware of their communication skills and of how they give, receive and process information. The majority of complaints made about health care professionals to their regulatory Colleges are related to poor communication; communication problems also figure prominently in many lawsuits against health care professionals (1). The importance of these skills on entry to the profession and

as part of ongoing competence to practice are clear as evidenced in the *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice* and the *Standards of Practice*, noted above.

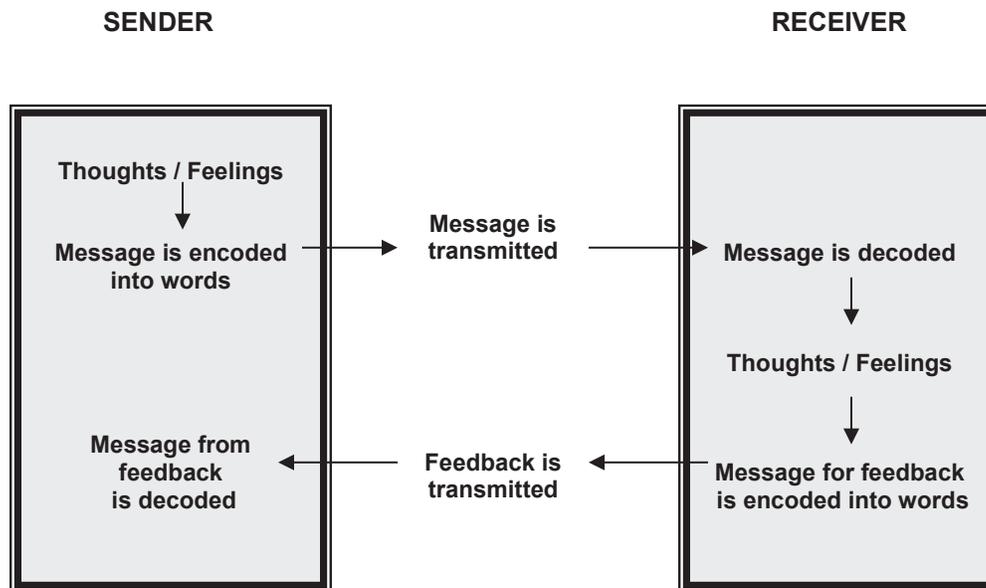
## **The Communication Process**

Numerous books and articles have been written on the topic of communication and the communication process. The basic communication process model diagrammed on the

following page demonstrates, in a very simple manner, the way in which two people communicate. Based on the diagram, the sender will encode their thoughts / feelings into words, and then transmit them to the receiver. The receiver decodes the message and develops thoughts / feelings associated with the message that they have received. They then encode their thoughts / feelings into words and send a message back to the original sender.

**KEY PRACTICE POINT**

**It is the responsibility of the sender to make sure that the receiver gets the message and that the message received is the one that was sent.**



Communication is a two-way process; the process is effective when the sender sends their message, the receiver receives it, and the message is understood by both parties. It is the responsibility of the sender to make sure that the receiver gets the message and that the message received is the one that was sent (3).

In some situations, there may be some type of obstacle or interference that enters into the communication process, resulting in a decrease in the effectiveness of the communication. Such an interference or obstacle is referred to as a “barrier” to effective communication. The ability to recognize and deal with such barriers is essential to the effectiveness of the communication process. Some of the more common barriers to effective communication and strategies to overcome them are discussed below (3).

***Distractions:*** Background noise, hearing difficulties, excessive heat or cold, interruptions, lack of privacy, pain / physical discomfort and stress are all examples of possible distractions that can interfere with the communication process. Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists should ensure that when communicating with others, there are as few distractions as possible.

**Poor Timing:** When the timing of communication does not meet the needs of both sender and receiver, the receiver may be distracted or unwilling to listen and / or the sender may say things that they did not intend to, thereby interfering with the communication process. To optimize the communication process, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists should ensure that both the speaker and the listener are ready for the communication to take place.

**Emotions:** People who are overcome with grief, anxiety, anger, defensiveness, etc. are often preoccupied with their circumstances and therefore may not be fully engaged in the communication that is taking place. Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists should be sensitive to the emotions of those with whom they are communicating, ensuring that the circumstances are appropriate for effective communication to take place.

**Differences in Background:** There may be interference to the communication process when the receiver lacks the knowledge, education, experience, or language skills to understand the message of the sender. Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists should assess the knowledge, education, experience, and language skills of those they communicate with and adapt their messages appropriately to ensure understanding by the receiver.

**Prejudice:** Prejudice may relate to a number of factors including age, gender, race, culture, religion, etc. Negative biases towards another individual for any reason have the potential to interfere with the communication process. To safeguard against prejudice, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists should treat everyone as individuals and with respect.

As we live in a multi-cultural society, many practitioners may find it helpful to learn about the customs of the various cultures that they may work with. For example, in some cultures, it is inappropriate to look into the eyes of another person. In other cultures, physical touch such as shaking hands is inappropriate. In some cultures, it is important to consider the role of the father, husband or senior male in a family when providing care / services to clients (1). It is therefore important to understand that cultural differences exist and to be sensitive to the effects on communication.

## Strategies for Effective Communication

Effective communication is not based on a single skill, but rather involves several skills. For example, when communicating, one must not only be able to speak to get their message across, but they must also be able to listen and understand what others are saying, as well as observe and interpret non-verbal communications.

In order to communicate effectively, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists require skills in verbal communications, listening, non-verbal communications and written communications. Strategies for effective communication in relation to each of these areas are discussed below:

### *Verbal Communication*

When communicating verbally, the words that are spoken are very important. However, the way in which the words are spoken is just as important as the choice of vocabulary. In their interactions with clients, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists can achieve effective verbal communications through the following strategies (1, 3):

- Plan and organize messages presenting the key points in a logical sequence.
- Get the attention and interest of the client; inform them of the purpose of the communication.
- Divide messages into small sections, communicating each portion slowly.
- Ensure that messages are understandable; choose vocabulary that meets the needs and level of understanding of the audience.
- Use good grammar and pronounce words accurately.
- Speak using a calm and respectful manner.
- Be honest and straight forward using a tactful and considerate manner.
- Provide an appropriate amount of information; avoid information overload.
- Summarize and repeat key points to reinforce the message.
- Ask open ended questions to ensure understanding of the client. It is the responsibility of the Registered Dietitian or Registered Nutritionist to ensure that the communication process has been effective.
- Give others the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification; ensure that the responses provided are within the practice statement of a Registered Dietitian and Registered Nutritionist.

#### **KEY PRACTICE POINT**

**When communicating verbally, the way in which the words are spoken is just as important as the choice of vocabulary.**

## *Listening*

The communication process is effective when there is mutual understanding between the sender and the receiver. Therefore, listening is just as important as speaking. However, it should be noted that listening is not the same thing as hearing. Hearing is a physical ability while listening is a skill that requires becoming involved and engaged in what is being said (1, 3, 4). People who have effective listening skills are better able to do the following (4):

### KEY PRACTICE POINT

**The communication process is effective when there is mutual understanding between the sender and the receiver. Therefore, listening is just as important as speaking.**

- Understand the underlying meanings in what is said by others
- Gain a clearer understanding of what is expected of them
- Build rapport with others
- Modify their speech to meet the needs of others
- Answer questions and resolve problems
- Contribute and work more effectively in a work team

Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists can increase the effectiveness of their listening skills through the following strategies (3, 4):

- Give full attention to the person who is speaking; concentrate and remain focused on what is being said rather than thinking about what you will say next.
- Allow the speaker to finish saying what they wish to say; do not interrupt.
- Listen carefully for the main ideas, demonstrating respect for the speaker.
- Provide appropriate feedback to reassure the speaker that you are listening, i.e. nod, smile, frown, laugh, etc. when appropriate.
- Verify understanding of the intended message by using active listening techniques which include the following (3):
  - **Mirroring:** Re-state the key phrases of the speaker using their exact words.
  - **Paraphrasing:** Re-state the key message of the speaker using your own words.

- **Summarizing:** Provide a condensed version of what the speaker has said, emphasizing the important points.
  - **Self-Disclosing:** Tell the speaker how you feel about what has been said and whether you agree or disagree.
- Ask questions to seek clarification.
  - Provide feedback.

### *Non-Verbal Communication*

“Non-verbal communication” or “body language” refers to those messages that are sent without the use of actual words. For example, during a verbal exchange between two people, both parties will also convey messages through the following (3):

**Facial expression:** The expression on the face of a person will often reveal a great deal about their attitude and emotions, communicating feelings such as happiness, agreement, confusion, anger, nervousness, defensiveness, embarrassment, etc.

**Eye Contact:** In Canadian culture, people who maintain eye contact during communications give the impression that they are confident, interested and engaged in the conversation. Alternately, those who avoid eye contact during communications often give the impression that they are passive, uninterested and / or possibly lying.

**Posture:** People who are comfortable and interested in a situation generally stand, walk, or sit in a relaxed manner. Slumped shoulders may communicate feelings of depression or hopelessness. An anxious or tense person will often move stiffly and may sit or stand with their arms folded tightly in front of themselves.

**Gestures:** The gestures of an individual also reveal a great deal about their attitude or feelings. Nodding may indicate that a person agrees with or understands what is being said. A person who is tense, uneasy, or nervous may play with their hair or an object such as a pen, chew on their lips or fingernails, drum their fingers, etc. Yawning or watching the clock may indicate boredom or a lack of interest. Holding a hand up may indicate that a person wishes someone else to stop.

**Physical Space:** All people have need for a certain amount of physical space between themselves and another individual. The amount of space required will vary with each person and with the type of relationship. For most North Americans, their comfort zone for family and friends ranges from 60 – 120 cm (2

– 4 feet); in interactions typical of most business transactions, counseling services, etc. the comfort zone is 120 – 365 cm (4 – 12 feet).

**Other Factors:** Non-verbal communication can also occur while an individual is speaking. For example, the quality of a person’s voice or their style of speaking can reveal emotions such as fear, stress, or anger. Even the dress of an individual can convey non-verbal messages to others.

**KEY PRACTICE POINT**

**To communicate effectively, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists must be able to recognize, interpret and respond to non-verbal communications.**

To communicate effectively, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists must be able to recognize, interpret and respond to non-verbal communications. This can be achieved through the following strategies (1, 3):

- Be sensitive and responsive to non-verbal messages that are being conveyed by others.
- Avoid conveying any non-verbal messages that may interfere with the communication process. Specifically, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists should:
  - Use appropriate facial expressions to demonstrate attention, understanding and concern.
  - Maintain appropriate eye contact and posture.
  - Be careful with the use of physical gestures.
  - Respect the personal sense of space of each individual.
  - Speak, dress, and conduct themselves in a professional manner.

### *Written Communications*

In their practice, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists provide written communications on a regular basis as they prepare records, reports, client chart notes, information / instructional materials, letters, memos, e-mails, etc.

**KEY PRACTICE POINT**

**Clear, organized writing generally corresponds with clear, organized thinking processes.**

Writing is one of the most challenging forms of communication for many people. Yet in many situations, writing is one of the best ways to communicate, being more concrete than verbal communications, with less room for misinterpretations, errors, and mistakes (5).

Clear, organized writing generally corresponds with clear,

organized thinking processes. However, the opposite is also true; unclear, disorganized writing generally corresponds with unclear, disorganized thinking processes. Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists should realize that their written communications may represent them for some period of time (3). Once something is in writing, it is permanent and is very difficult to take back (5).

Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists can increase the effectiveness of their written communications through the following strategies (3, 5):

- Write in a clear, accurate, concise, organized manner, ensuring logical flow.
- Use language that will be understood by the reader; avoid slang words, symbols and abbreviations (unless clearly defined).
- Ensure use of correct spelling, particularly for the names of people and companies.
- Use good grammar.
- Keep sentences clear and short.
- Proofread carefully; do not rely on spell check.

Overall, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists require skills in verbal communications, listening, non-verbal communications and written communications in order to communicate effectively. They also must be skilled at determining when each of these types of communication is the most appropriate means by which to communicate. Regardless of the means by which they choose to communicate, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists should ensure that all of their communications meet the attributes listed below:

- **Accuracy:** The content is valid and without errors.
- **Accessible:** The content is placed where the appropriate audience is able to access it.
- **Reliable:** The content is from a credible source and based on current evidence.
- **Timely:** The content is provided when the timing is most appropriate for the audience.
- **Understandable:** The language level is appropriate for the specific audience.

### *Special Considerations When Communicating with Clients*

The strategies for effective communication in relation to verbal communications, listening, non-verbal communications and written communications are applicable in a wide variety of situations and practice settings. In addition to the strategies discussed so far, there are some special considerations that should be made when communicating and collaborating with clients, whether in a clinical, community or administrative / management setting.

#### **During the First Visit (Adapted from 1):**

- Be punctual; apologize if there is a delay.
- Introduce yourself, describe your qualifications and the nature of your practice; information on promotional materials, advertisements, business cards, etc. should be consistent with the introduction provided. If in an institutional setting, ask the client if it would be a good time to have a discussion.
- Discuss confidentiality issues, explaining who would have access to client information, i.e. the referring physician, other health care providers, health insurance providers, supervisors / managers, etc.
- Explain the precise nature and reasons for each component of the care / services that will be provided,
- Obtain informed consent throughout the process of providing care / services, as appropriate.
- Collaborate with the client to develop goals and a plan for achievement of those goals.
- Acknowledge any fear and embarrassment that the client may feel during provision of care or services; reassure the client by demonstrating respect and empathy.
- When appropriate, provide and review handouts, checklists, diagrams, etc. to reinforce concepts discussed.
- If applicable, discuss details of the financial aspects of the care / services provided, being clear about the terms of payment.
- Discuss the anticipated length of time that care / services will be provided and what will occur when care / services are no longer required.
- Ensure that both parties have appropriate contact information for each other.
- If applicable, confirm the date and time of the next visit.

**During Subsequent Visits (1):**

- Discuss any progress made or setbacks in achieving the established goals.
- Continuously assess client understanding of the established goals and the plan for achievement of those goals.
- Discuss any changes to the established goals, the plan for achievement of those goals, or in the care / services being provided; continue to obtain informed consent throughout the process of providing care / services, as appropriate.

**At Discharge or Final Visit (1):**

- Ensure that the client and pertinent others i.e. family, associates, etc. agree with the discharge or end to the provision of care / services.
- Discuss the progress made and whether or not the established goals were achieved.
- Review options available to the client once they are discharged or provision of care / services has ended, ensuring that applicable supports are in place.
- Ask for feedback on the care / services provided using the information to ensure continuous quality improvement.

During all visits, when working with interpreters or client care givers, speak directly to the client. Be aware that an interpreter may not accurately translate what the Registered Dietitian or Registered Nutritionist or the client has said.

***Special Considerations When Communicating via Social Media***

Although best practice strategies for written communication also apply via social media, whether for personal or professional use, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists should pay close attention to their written communication style including tone, use of jargon, abbreviations, and professional writing skills in general when communicating in an online environment. As noted above, written content may represent the professional for some time as online content cannot be considered temporary or private. Content may also be taken out of context, therefore clear, concise, professional writing is essential at all times, via all media. See Chapter 13 Social Media and Electronic Practice for more information.

### *Special Considerations When Communicating with Professionals and Colleagues*

#### **KEY PRACTICE POINT**

**Maintaining accurate, timely and respectful communication in a collaborative manner is essential to the provision of quality dietetic services.**

As professionals, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists not only communicate and collaborate with their clients, but also with other professionals. These professionals may include other Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists as well as professionals from other health care disciplines. The strategies for effective communication discussed in this chapter are all applicable to communicating in an effective manner with professionals and colleagues. Maintaining accurate, timely and respectful communication in a collaborative manner is essential to the provision of quality

dietetic services (1).

### **The Importance of Team Work/Interprofessional Collaboration**

In the *Wisdom of Teams*, Katzenbach and Smith define a work team as follows: “A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.”<sup>92</sup> Work teams typically include a number of individuals from differing backgrounds, each of whom contribute their professional expertise through collaborative decision making. The collective wisdom and productivity of an effective work team will always outperform the efforts of skilled professionals working on an individual basis. Effective work teams are able to overcome organizational barriers and improve communication among the various departments of an organization (3, 6).

#### **KEY PRACTICE POINT**

**The collective wisdom and productivity of an effective work team will always outperform the efforts of skilled professionals working on an individual basis.**

In health care settings, teamwork is synonymous with interprofessional collaboration, where health professionals work together and with the client/patient to optimize client-centred care.

Team work involves the interaction of the following five key elements: goals, tasks and roles, shared leadership and decision making, communication, and conflict resolution. Each element is discussed briefly below (7).

#### **Goals**

In order to work in an effective manner, a work team needs to determine what the focus of the team should be, what the team needs to accomplish and what the goals of the work team are. Over time, the team will need to evaluate the established goals and determine if they continue to be valid.

<sup>92</sup> Katzenbach, J. and Smith, D. *The Wisdom of Teams*. Harper Collins, New York, USA; 1993, p. 45.

### ***Tasks and Roles***

A work team is most productive when they have a clear sense of their prime responsibilities. It is important for the team to determine the tasks / roles that need to be performed, who is most capable of performing the various tasks / roles, and ensure that the workload is shared fairly among the members of the work team.

### ***Shared Leadership and Decision Making***

An effective work team relies on the participation of all members. Each member is responsible for the outcome of the work team and as such, must share in the leadership and decision-making processes of the team.

### ***Communication***

Effective communication skills are vital to a work team. Team members must communicate in a collaborative manner to ensure that the work team functions effectively and that the established goals of the work team are met. Barriers to effective communication must be recognized and addressed so that the team members can focus on building interpersonal relationships.

### ***Conflict Resolution***

An effective team is able to deal with and resolve conflicts. The work team needs to identify what they will do in the case of a disagreement and know what skills and processes they will need to succeed in resolving conflicts. Team members must feel free to raise issues of concern knowing that a mutual respect exists among team members.

## **Stages of Team Development**

Effective work teams are not formed instantaneously. They typically pass through the following distinct developmental stages before becoming productive: forming, storming, norming and performing. Some work teams will go through the stages quite rapidly, while others require more time. The length of time that it takes to pass through each stage of team development depends on the composition of the work team, the capabilities of each of the members on the team, and the team leadership. All teams should be prepared to experience some challenging or stressful periods prior to experiencing the benefits of a productive team. Each stage of team development is discussed below (3, 6).

### *Forming*

The “forming” stage of team development is the stage when team members are first brought together and begin to connect. During this stage, team members tend to focus more on learning about the roles, skills, and background of each other rather than focusing on achieving team goals or performing tasks. Communication tends to be polite and guarded as team members get to know each other. Members may have many questions and wonder why they are on the team, what are the rules of the team, etc. Anxiety levels tend to be high and productivity levels tend to be low during the forming stage of team development.

At this stage of team development, work team members need to make the transition from being “individuals” to “team members”. Strategies for effective team building during this stage could include the following:

- Ensure that everyone on the team participates.
- Have team members work together to develop a team mission statement, a code of conduct, goals, and procedures.
- Facilitate opportunities for team members to get to know each other and develop a sense of trust.

### *Storming*

“Storming” is the stage of team development where conflict first arises, often as a result of attempts to clarify the goals and values of the work team. The politeness of the group gives way as personality differences become more apparent and members begin to perceive problems related to the team goals, workload, team leadership and hierarchical patterns. Members may have questions and ask who is really in charge of the team, why some members don’t seem to be listening, how conflicts will be resolved, etc. At this stage, there is often a decrease in the level of performance of the work team.

Strategies for effective team building during this stage could include the following:

- Encourage open communication and interaction among team members.
- Facilitate negotiation and conflict resolution.
- Have team members re-evaluate the goals, tasks, and roles of the team.

### *Norming*

During the “norming” phase of team development, the storm begins to pass, and the work team begins to act and function like a true team. Conflicts have been resolved and team members tend to be more tolerant of each other, appreciating the diverse perspectives and personalities within the work team. Roles have been established; the goals of the work team have been clarified; the work team begins to become a cohesive unit.

Strategies for effective team building during this stage could include the following:

- Continue to encourage open communication among team members.
- Ensure that leadership is shared among team members.

### *Performing*

During the “performing” stage of team development, the team is working towards achieving the goals of the work team in an effective manner. Productivity and trust tend to be high as members of the work team are committed to common goals and hold themselves mutually accountable for achieving those goals.

Strategies for effective team building during this stage could include the following:

- Continue to review the goals, tasks, and roles of the team.
- Continue to facilitate productive conflict resolution.
- Facilitate changing roles within the team and addition of new members.

### *Adjourning*

There are times when a team member leaves the team, thereby affecting the dynamics and productivity of the team. The loss of certain key players and the skills that they had contributed typically leads to a re-assessment of roles and responsibilities. The work team may regress to an earlier stage of team development while the work team re-establishes itself.

Strategies for effective team building during this stage could include the following:

- Reassure the team that change is inevitable but manageable.
- Encourage team members to re-evaluate the tasks and roles of the team and to re-establish themselves as a productive team.

## Effective Work Teams

Effective work teams are empowered to establish the goals of the team, to make decisions about how to achieve those goals, to carry out the tasks required to achieve those goals, and to be mutually accountable for their results. The work of a team is optimal when the team members interact using a collaborative approach. Using a collaborative manner requires balancing the many interests, strengths, needs and capacities of the members of the work team.

Key elements, or the six C's, of an effective work team are as follows (3, 6):

***Communication:*** Open, honest, and transparent communication is essential to the effectiveness of the team. Members of a work team require skills in verbal communications, listening, non-verbal communications and written communications.

***Clear Purpose:*** Each member in an effective work team helps to define and accepts the mission, goals, roles, and responsibilities of the work team.

***Commitment:*** The members of a work team must be committed to work with their team and others as required to achieve their established goals. They also must be able to negotiate and resolve conflicts effectively.

***Cooperation:*** A work team must function in a cooperative manner, focusing on the established goals of the team and sharing in the decision-making process; roles and responsibilities must be balanced and shared. The work team shares accountability for the work of the team and the outcomes achieved.

***Complimentary Skills and Expertise:*** Each member of a team contributes their unique skills and expertise to the work of the team. The collective combination of skills and expertise results in a work team that as a whole is more highly effective.

***Climate of Trust and Mutual Respect:*** A climate of trust and mutual respect is essential in facilitating all of the elements of an effective work team listed above.

Interacting with others is an important aspect of the practice of all Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists, regardless of role, practice area or practice setting. In their practice, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists may interact with clients, family members / caregivers, staff, co-workers, colleagues, other professionals, students / dietetic interns, members of work teams, sales representatives, the general public, their regulatory body, professional associations, etc. Regardless of where or with whom the various interactions occur, the ability to communicate effectively is fundamental to good dietetic practice. The work of Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists generally involves communicating with others on a one-on-one basis and with groups such as work teams. The ability to work effectively as a member of a work team is also an important skill for dietetic practitioners. All Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists can benefit from continually striving to improve their communication and team work skills.

## Chapter Summary

Communication is a two-way process that occurs through speaking, writing, listening, and observing as individuals share ideas, thoughts, and feelings. The ability to communicate effectively is a foundational skill required by all Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists. The communication process is effective when the sender sends their message, the receiver receives it, and the message is understood by both parties. It is the responsibility of the sender to make sure that the receiver gets the message and that the message received is the one that was sent. Barriers to effective communication include distractions, poor timing, emotions, differences in background and prejudices. The ability to recognize and deal with such barriers is essential to the effectiveness of the communication process. In order to communicate effectively, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists require skills in verbal communications, listening, non-verbal communications and written communications.

Work teams typically include a number of individuals from differing backgrounds, each of whom contribute their professional expertise through collaborative decision making. The collective wisdom and productivity of an effective team will always outperform the efforts of skilled professionals working on an individual basis. The stages of team development include forming, storming, norming and performing. Effective work teams are empowered to establish the goals of the team, to make decisions about how to achieve those goals, to carry out the tasks required to achieve those goals, and to be mutually accountable for their results. The work of a team is optimal when the team members interact using a collaborative approach. Key elements of an effective work team include communication, clear purpose, commitment, cooperation, complimentary skills and expertise, and a climate of trust and mutual respect. Good communication and team work skills are important to good dietetic practice; all Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists can benefit from continually striving to improve their communication and team work skills.

## Case Scenario 13.1

LL is a Registered Dietitian who specializes in dysphagia and is a member of the Feeding & Swallowing Disorders team in an urban hospital. Her day gets off to a rather rough start as she deals with a number of “last minute crisis” situations related to getting her 6-, 8- and 10-year-old off to school. After working her way through numerous construction zones, she finally arrives at work, about 20 minutes late. The receptionist informs LL that her first client who is scheduled for a videofluoroscopic swallowing study has been waiting for the last 30 minutes.

LL hurries to the assessment room and greets the Speech Language Pathologist and the Occupational Therapist who are also on the team. Once the team is ready, they invite the client into the assessment room. He is an elderly gentleman who does not speak English. His daughter who speaks English and her baby accompany him. As the team is running late, they quickly introduce themselves. Typically, they would explain the procedure that would take place using an educational brochure to help the client understand the purpose of the assessment, the inherent risks of proceeding, the implications for treatment planning, etc. However, since the client does not speak English, they decide to go ahead without the lengthy explanation. After all, the client had signed the hospital consent to treatment form. Throughout the assessment, the client appears anxious, and sounds upset as he tries to speak to the team.

Following the assessment, the Feeding & Swallowing team members meet to review the results of the assessment and establish a treatment plan for the client. At the same time, LL begins reviewing the chart of the client they will be seeing next. As the discussions proceed, one of the team members expresses concern about the way in which the team was rushed, that the client was not properly informed about the procedure and therefore was unable to provide proper consent. She was also unhappy that the team did nothing to address the language barrier that existed in this case. LL takes the comments personally and snaps at the team members in anger.

### Case Scenario 13.1 Questions

1. What are the concerns in the way in which LL is conducting her practice?
2. What suggestions would you have to help LL improve her communication skills?
3. What suggestions would you have to help LL improve her team work skills?

## Chapter Quiz

1. All of the following statements are true *except* for the following:
  - a) When communicating verbally, the choice of vocabulary is more important than the way in which the words are spoken.
  - b) To achieve mutual understanding between two people, the ability to listen is just as important as the ability to speak.
  - c) Non-verbal communication can be a barrier to effective communication.
  - d) Clear, organized written communications generally correspond with clear, organized thinking processes.
  
2. Poor communication skills can result in:
  - a) crossing professional boundaries
  - b) conflict of interest situations
  - c) errors in obtaining consent to practice
  - d) All of the above
  
3. All of the following statements are examples of good communication practices *except* for the following:
  - a) There is a lot of noise around the office of a Registered Dietitian or Registered Nutritionist (RD) as a result of office renovations that are being completed nearby. The RD has all of her appointments moved to a quiet office in another area.
  - b) A Registered Dietitian or Registered Nutritionist (RD) notices that a client has a very confused look on her face. The RD summarizes the key points made so far and asks the client questions to assess their understanding of the discussion.
  - c) A Registered Dietitian or Registered Nutritionist (RD) is completing a written report for her supervisor. The phone rings and a client begins to discuss problems that she is experiencing. The RD continues writing her report as she listens to the client.
  - d) A Registered Dietitian or Registered Nutritionist (RD) who is part of a work team notices that one member has not been participating in the team discussion and attempts to draw the member into the discussion by asking them what they think.
  
4. All of the following statements are true *except* for the following:
  - a) The collective wisdom and productivity of an effective work team will always outperform the efforts of skilled professionals working on an individual basis.
  - b) During the “forming stage” of team development, productivity and trust tend to be high as members of the work team are committed to common goals and hold themselves mutually accountable for achieving those goals.
  - c) The work of a team is optimal when the team members interact using a collaborative approach.
  - d) Open, honest and transparent communication is essential to the effectiveness of a work team.

## References

1. Steinecke, Richard, LLB and the College of Dietitians of Ontario. *The Jurisprudence Handbook for Dietitians in Ontario*; 2008.
2. Lund, Craig. “Start Talking: Effective Communication Strategies”, *Extended Care Product News*. 2006; 107(2): 14-15.
3. Kavanaugh, R. and Ninemeier, J. *Supervision in the Hospitality Industry*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Educational Institute of the American Hotel & Lodging Association. Michigan, USA; 2001.
4. “Listening Skills: Why You Need to Be an Active Listener”. Available from: [http://careerplanning.about.com/cs/miscskills/a/listening\\_skill.htm](http://careerplanning.about.com/cs/miscskills/a/listening_skill.htm)
5. “Writing Skills: Communicating With Words”. Available from: [http://careerplanning.about.com/cs/miscskills/a/writing\\_skills.htm](http://careerplanning.about.com/cs/miscskills/a/writing_skills.htm)
6. Capital Health, Calgary Health Region. *Team Development in Primary Care Networks*; 2006.
7. White, H. *Teams*. Chapter 8 “Guiding Facilitation in the Canadian Context: Enhancing Primary Health Care”. Department of Health and Community Services, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador; 2006.