



RICE HUMANITIES
Medical Humanities

Health, Humanism, and Society Scholars – Project Submission Form

Project Title: Reflection at the Intersection – Addressing Conflict among Interprofessional Teams

Project Description:

Advances in science and technology are accelerating, rapidly producing new possibilities for cure or sustaining life. Modern medical care for critically ill children clearly meets the definition of a *VUCA* situation (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) with an additional “R” factor of high risk (suffering and potential death of a child). However, these possibilities often entail increasing complexity in diagnosis and treatment thus amplifying the VUCA+R equation. The circumstances of care for a critically ill child create a unique psychological, social and technical crucible for all involved, one primed for conflict.

Our group has explored inter-group conflict between healthcare providers caring for critically ill children from initial observations to broad, systematic surveys and qualitative analysis of targeted practitioner focus groups. Our observations and surveys found that conflict between physicians is not an uncommon occurrence and is associated with both distress for practitioners and threats to quality of care and safety for patient/families. Additionally, unconscious inter-group dynamics, shaped by specific setting variables, can significantly impair collective work towards the best interests of patients in these fraught circumstances.

In an attempt to develop interventions aimed at reducing inter-group conflict we first conducted eight specialty-specific focus groups composed of physicians, fellows, and nurses from the following Pediatric services: Hematology/Oncology, Bone Marrow Transplantation and Critical Care Medicine. The participants were told that their input would inform the design of future strategies to improve care coordination. Focus group sessions were recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

Each group was asked to respond to four questions:

- What are the typical scenarios that lead to conflict between specialty groups?
- What are the implications for patient care in each scenario?
- What are your hypotheses for the causes of conflict in each scenario?
- Based on your hypotheses, what strategies do you recommend to manage such situations for the best interests of patients/families?

The project team then designed a pilot procedure for conducting a provider care conference using features associated with systematic, validated approaches to reaching agreement in groups where there are significant differences of opinion. Three mock care conference sessions were recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

The aim of this project will be to describe the key components of interprofessional conflict and outcome of a structured, facilitated provider care conference aimed at identifying and addressing conflict to move patient care forward. Recordings from 9 focus groups and 3 mock care conference sessions associated



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with this project are available for qualitative review. Students will assist with data analysis and supplemental literature reviews in preparation for work on manuscripts.

Institution and Location: Texas Children's Hospital

Project timeframe (2 semesters is standard, 1 semester options also): 2 semesters

Prerequisite training: None – we will provide students with framework for qualitative analysis using consensual coding methodology. Familiarity with Excel and Word for coding and data management would be useful.

Knowledge and skills student can expect to gain: This project may be of particular interest to students who are considering careers in health care or find the social and psychological aspects of medicine and science interesting (e.g. medical anthropology). Students who have an interest in group and organizational dynamics, particularly leadership may also find this attractive. Students will have the opportunity to learn the basics of qualitative analysis including exposure to the type of software programs used in such research. These research principles and practices have wide applications in the social sciences. The students will also have an opportunity to experience what it is like to work in a large academic medical enterprise.

Expectations of student (Rice University requirements are listed):

- The student must devote 8 hours per week to the project (consistent with a 3-credit course) and will develop a timeline of activities in collaboration with supervisor(s). The student will meet at least monthly with the faculty supervisor(s) to evaluate progress.

Expectations of PIs/project sponsors: Provide guidance in data management, coding and analysis; supporting student learning and exploration of medical culture and interprofessional work.

- The projects should be designed with the academic rigor of Rice University in mind, and abide by the U.S. Department of Labor's Fair Labor Standards Act for unpaid internships. Mid-semester and final supervisor evaluations will be submitted to evaluate student's professional progress. Complete details found here: [Project Sponsor Eligibility](#).