



The 10 Building Blocks of Primary Care Ground Rules

Background and Description

Ground rules (or group agreements) are vital to effective team functioning. We move between many settings with different rules, and we often navigate those rules without discussing them. Is it okay to be 5 minutes late? Is it okay to check text messages during a meeting? By discussing and agreeing upon rules, a group defines what it means to be courteous to each other. Ground rules ensure productive, respectful meetings, and they guarantee high-functioning teams during patient care. Ground rules need to be agreed upon by unanimous consensus, otherwise they lose their power. For example, if everyone – including physicians – agrees that physicians are expected to come to meetings (and to clinic) on time, then there is basis on which to hold physicians accountable. If all team members – MAs, nurses, and front desk included – agree that everyone is expected to participate actively in meetings, then those that hold back and do not talk can be held accountable. If ground rules, agreed upon by everyone, stipulate that team members will give constructive feedback to each other on a regular basis, then it is easier for doctors and clinical staff to give each other feedback on performance and behavior. Different ground rules may be needed for meetings and for working together during patient care.

Instructions

This excerpt from our team-based care curriculum can be used to lead a group through a discussion and guide the development of ground rules for your team. Read the introductory material together, and ask for volunteers to read the dialogues. The discussion questions and activities may be used to guide a conversation around ground rules and develop ground rules for your group.

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Ground Rules

Primary care teams need rules of engagement, **ground rules**, to work together effectively and produce desirable outcomes.

All team sports have a set of rules implemented to keep the game organized. The rules also guide teams to work together effectively.



For instance, basket players use their hands to dribble and shoot, as stated in the rules. If players started kicking the ball into the basket, the game would quickly become chaotic. Teammates would not know what to expect from one another and, as a result, teamwork would suffer.

Ground rules help primary care teams:

- Maintain open lines of communication
- Relay pertinent information
- Communicate in a timely manner



Teams can standardize communication by utilizing ground rules to deliver and receive information. Ground rules help create a safe and respectful culture that allow all team members to express concerns and become more involved in patient care.



At a team meeting, ground rules are suggested, voted upon, and put into action. Each team member should agree with and follow the ground rules.

Some examples of ground rules are:

- Minute to minute communication: Interruptions are OK as long as neither party is with a patient
- Huddles: Staff presents first, clinicians present last
- Team meetings: Team members rotate chairing meeting



Reflection

1. Should ground rules serve the team or the individual?
2. How do ground rules affect patients?
3. How should a team approach a team member who does want to implement a ground rule that will help the team and the patients?
4. How should a team deal with those who don't follow the rules?

Exercise 1: Candid Conversations

Let's read some conversations between team members. We will have a discussion after each conversation.

Teamlet 1: Sick Talk

The MA has combed the schedule and is presenting findings to the provider.

MA: Do you have time now to go over the schedule?

Dr. Brashy: Not really. [Sighs] What is it?

MA: Well, a few patients in the schedule may not need to come in for a visit.

Dr. Brashy: As I've told you, I want to see all of my patients. Whom are you referring to?

MA: For instance, Dia Betes has an appointment tomorrow but just came in last week for a cough. This appointment is to review labs but she told us she wouldn't be able to go to the lab for 2 weeks. Should I call her and reschedule the appointment?

Dr. Brashy: No. Her diabetes is out of control, I need to see her. Who else?

MA: Fred Frequent was here 2 weeks ago and 2 weeks before that. His meds and labs are up to date.

Dr. Brashy: Keep him; he enjoys our visits. Sorry, gotta go to lunch. See ya.

The End

Discussion

- How would you describe the communication style used by the MA? And that used by Dr. Brashy?
- Is Dr. Brashy working with the MA as a team? What could he do differently to be a better team player?
- What ground rules would help teamlet 1?
- What else may help this teamlet function more effectively?

Teamlet 2: Healthy Communication

The MA has combed the schedule and is presenting findings to the provider.

MA: Do you have time now to go over the schedule?

Dr. Teemwurk: Yes. This is a great time; I have about 10 minutes before my next patient.

MA: So I found a few patients who may not need to come in for a visit but I wasn't quite sure what to do.

Dr. Teemwurk: Let's go over them now.

MA: Yes. First, Dia Betes has a follow up appointment scheduled but just came in last week for a cough and you saw her 2 months ago for a cold. I am not sure if I should reschedule her.

Dr. Teemwurk: Yes, let's keep her. I adjusted her meds last visit and I want to follow up. I'm sorry; I don't think I indicated that I wanted to do a med follow up in her chart. That would have been helpful.

MA: No problem. Second patient is Fred Frequent, who was here 2 weeks ago and 2 weeks before that. His meds and labs are up to date.

Dr. Teemwurk: What is he in the schedule for?

MA: Diabetes follow-up. I wasn't sure if you had done a med adjustment. Should I keep him in or reschedule?

Dr. Teemwurk: I didn't so let's reschedule for when his A1c is due. He doesn't need to be in here every other week!

MA: Those are my only two questions. And I scrubbed out two patients using the protocol.

Dr. Teemwurk: Great, let's go to lunch!

The End

Discussion

- How would you describe the communication style used by the MA? And that used by Dr. Teemwurk?
- Is Dr. Teemwurk working with the MA as a team? What is this teamlet doing to work together effectively?
- What ground rules do you think teamlet 2 has put into action?
- What else is helping teamlet 2 function more effectively than teamlet 1?

Exercise 2: Get Ground Rules

Get together with those who you consider part of your team.



Create at least one ground rule to help with:

- creating a more positive team environment
- improving collaboration
- improving patient care