

## THE ROLE OF HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS IN QUALITY CARE DELIVERY

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### Abstract

Healthcare professionals play a vital role in the delivery of quality care. Understanding the historical and contemporary view on healthcare professionals and their role improves the understanding of quality care delivery. Various qualities, skills, and education possessed by healthcare professionals enhance the delivery of healthcare. Healthcare professionals have a professional obligation to society and the public. Therefore, it is essential to understand the medical, nursing, and allied healthcare professionals' role in the quality delivery of care. Healthcare professionals often face ethical concerns while dealing with patients. The pandemic affected the well-being of healthcare professionals in several ways. There is currently a burnout among healthcare professionals, which not only affects their health but also affects patient safety (Bhardwaj, 2022). However, there are various interventions that ensure the well-being of healthcare professionals. Healthcare professionals are the backbone of any healthcare system. Therefore, it is essential to understand the role of healthcare professionals in safe and quality care delivery.

The advancement of technology, the pandemic, and quality improvement initiative have impacted how healthcare practice is delivered and developed. There is a growing interest in the role of healthcare professionals in enhancing the delivery of healthcare. The care need is generally assessed through a triaging process, where the patient needs to be the focus and center of care. Although healthcare professionals possess diverse training and expertise, in the past, there was an overlap of delivery care among different health professionals. Currently, there is a need for patient-

centered care to be delivered by a primary healthcare professional. However, this also requires a collaborative approach from all the involved professionals. A wide variety of skills and attitudes are needed for healthcare professionals to work in a patient-centered approach. Diversity among healthcare professionals improves access to care and is associated with better clinical outcomes ((Arend R.) van Stenis et al., 2017). Future consideration should focus on the different objectives and measures of success in the care network and how this impacts the role of healthcare professionals. Furthermore, directions for future research should enhance the understanding of the role of healthcare professionals in quality care delivery.

## 1.2 Keywords

Keywords: healthcare professionals; quality care; quality improvement; patient care; interprofessional healthcare; healthcare burnout; healthcare training; healthcare roles.

Healthcare professionals play a critical role in the delivery of quality care to patients. This essay will explore the different roles of healthcare professionals and how they contribute to quality care delivery. Interprofessional healthcare collaboration has been defined as two or more professions working together to deliver high-quality care (Bhardwaj, 2022). Quality healthcare is defined as care that is safe, effective, patient-centered, timely, efficient, and equitable. For this discussion, quality care refers to healthcare that meets the above definition of quality.

Minimally, interprofessional collaboration requires a team of different healthcare professionals who work together to deliver patient care. Given the complexity of patient needs, this is the usual mode of care delivery in contemporary healthcare practice. An overview of the different healthcare roles found in a typical healthcare team will be provided, and the contribution of these roles to quality care will be discussed. Additionally, an examination of the factors that disrupt teamwork and interprofessional collaboration will be included, focusing on the current context of widespread burnout among healthcare professionals. A discussion of how to address these issues will be included, with a focus on training.

## 1.3 1. Introduction

Within the labyrinth of contemporary society, there usually emerges an entity concerned with the wellness and prosperity of its constituents. Communities often forge together to form city-states, nations, and governments. Businesses, universities, and nonprofits coalesce to address needs, aspirations, and social betterment. Likewise, within these collectives, there arises a Covenant Coalition charged with nurturing wellbeing—a healthcare delivery system. In a healthcare paradigm, covenants are forged between clients (e.g., patients, their families, and society) and care providers (e.g., doctors, allied professionals, nurses, and organizations). These covenants necessitate contingent professional responsibilities. Collectively, these responsibilities define the healthcare professional roles expounded herein (Bhardwaj, 2022). This exploration initially recounts the evolution of professional roles over the centuries and, subsequently, ponders current dynamics and trends.

Currently, healthcare professionals are facing numerous challenges in the delivery of quality care. Some issues are systemic: i.e., ingrained in the culture, politics, and economics of the healthcare delivery system. Others are more recent: i.e., emerging from ever-evolving patient needs, expectations, and acuity. Regardless, healthcare professions are tasked to negotiate, manage, and resolve these encumbrances, oftentimes under inordinate stress. Professional responsibilities

related to the delivery and management of quality care are complex, intricate, and multilayered. Each responsibility encompasses a constellation of tasks requiring diverse understanding, education, training, and skill sets (Ghiyasvandian et al., 2015). Furthermore, disposition and execution of professional responsibilities necessitate vigilance over ethical pitfalls. Professional responsibilities exist in a broader inter-professional context. Hence, teamwork, efficacious communication, and mutual respect are integral to the proper execution of professional responsibilities. Additionally, technological advancements profoundly influence the nature and method of care delivery, compelling professionals to continuously learn and readjust their roles and skill sets accordingly.

#### 1.4 2. Historical Perspectives on Healthcare Professional Roles

An in-depth exploration of healthcare professional roles and their development over time is presented. Examining how provider roles were historically shaped, this investigation unveils the ongoing evolution of professional roles in contemporary contexts. Healthcare needs have significantly altered over the last century, resulting in corresponding changes in the roles of healthcare professionals. This transformation has not only affected what healthcare providers are expected to do but has also reshaped their professional identities within society ((Antoinette) de Bont et al., 2016). Many professions now provide services to the public that were previously the responsibility of individuals or informal groups, adjusting their roles in parallel with the emergence of new professional tasks. Similarly, once widely practiced health-related duties within society became the domain of healthcare professionals, necessitating a reformulation of their roles to accommodate emerging health needs.

As a consequence, the past century has experienced struggles between the public and various professions over the recognition and regulation of professional roles. While healthcare professional roles have been historically addressed, the focus is primarily on the inspirations and influences behind professional roles, including culture, technology, and changes in policy. These concerns are contextualized within broader discussions on the health expertise of professionals for discourse in necessary and desirable professional roles in future healthcare delivery. Highlighted is the importance of historical perspectives for understanding contemporary practice and trends, as history contains lessons on how to improve healthcare delivery (Bhardwaj, 2022). Attention is directed to the past, emphasizing the relevance of historical perspectives in interrogating professional roles and indicating how this is pursued.

#### 1.5 3. Current Trends in Healthcare Professional Roles

This article investigates the current trends impacting the roles of healthcare professionals. These trends include the increasing importance of health teams and interprofessional collaboration in delivering effective patient-centered care. However, the ongoing impact of health system integration on these arrangements seems uncertain. The article also analyses the effect of technological advancements on professional roles and responsibilities, focusing on developments like telemedicine and virtual care that have rapidly grown post-pandemic and are now key modes of healthcare delivery ((Antoinette) de Bont et al., 2016). Other trends emerging from a socio-cultural perspective, such as a shift in patient expectations and the demand for ever more personalized care approaches, are explored. While these challenges to the need for health professionals appear global, healthcare disparities and accessibility issues put additional pressure on the systems in many countries.

Professional roles are at the center of policy discussions on how to tackle these issues. In Europe, increasingly diverse professional roles are being introduced across health systems. Currently, nine countries are included in this study: Belgium, Croatia, England, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. It is highlighted how these roles have evolved and what factors shaped these developments by focusing on primary care as a relevant and challenging context for professional roles. This wider perspective adds to the current literature, which largely emphasizes one country or one specific new role. The findings may inform policymakers and stakeholders considering the introduction or further development of new roles in their countries. Finally, the implications for future practice and policy are considered.

#### 1.6 4. Key Qualities and Skills for Healthcare Professionals

Quality care delivery necessitates a well-rounded healthcare professional educated and trained in various essential qualities and skills. The necessary skills and qualities healthcare professionals need to ensure quality care delivery include effective communication abilities, empathy and compassion, active listening skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, adaptability and resilience, the capacity to work in a team and collaborate with others (A Meyer, 2019). Communication involves using verbal and non-verbal means to convey messages. Healthcare professionals must effectively communicate with their patients to build trust and a rapport that fosters openness and honesty in sharing information. Having a caring attitude, empathy means fully understanding an individual's feelings and emotions. Healthcare professionals must be empathetic when dealing with patients as they might be in pain or feeling vulnerable and emotional. Therefore, having empathy helps build and strengthen the patient-healthcare professional relationship while increasing the possibility of delivering quality care. Listening is a crucial aspect of communication, actively and attentively listening to what someone says. Effective communication is not just about transmitting information; it also involves listening. Therefore, healthcare professionals must have active listening skills to ensure they receive all the details and information relayed by the patient and respond appropriately. Critical thinking entails examining a situation to make an informed judgment. On the other hand, problem-solving is the ability to identify a problem and find a solution. In the healthcare sector, professionals often deal with complex situations that require critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Thus, these two skills are essential to ensuring quality care delivery. Healthcare professionals must possess critical thinking skills to assess all aspects of a situation before drawing conclusions. Similarly, having problem-solving skills helps identify the most effective solution to a problem. In healthcare, most situations can involve multiple solutions; hence, professionals must discern which one would best suit the situation. Being adaptable means being prepared and able to change when necessary, while resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity quickly. A constantly changing environment characterizes the healthcare setting. Therefore, professionals must be adaptable to cope with changes, whether new policies, technologies, or care approaches. In addition, the healthcare sector is usually fast-paced, creating stressful situations. Resilience is vital in coping with such a setting; thus, professionals must endure pressures for quality care delivery. It is also paramount for healthcare professionals to work in a team and collaborate with other team members. Often, patient care involves many healthcare professionals, including nurses, physicians, specialists, pharmacists, and social workers. Therefore, teamwork and collaboration skills are fundamental in ensuring holistic care to the patient.

### 1.7 5. Interprofessional Collaboration in Healthcare Delivery

For healthcare delivery to be optimal, collaboration between professions is essential. A team that incorporates members from all disciplines is better equipped to meet patient needs of all kinds, and the diversity of expertise available ensures that quality care can be rendered (M. Ries, 2016). There is extensive literature on the benefits of collaborative care, interprofessional practice, and teamwork, and a great wealth of research that indicates improved patient outcomes when healthcare practitioners work together across disciplines. However, there are barriers to collaboration, which can occur at any stage of education or care delivery. Abundant evidence suggests that the biggest issues arise in communication: jargon can differ between professions, and misunderstandings or misinterpretations can easily occur (Sonke et al., 2017). Other barriers include the rigid organization of many health-related institutions in hierarchies, which places some professionals above others; those in superior positions often failing to see the value of other professions; and a worry, especially among physicians and other professionals with substantial training, that their roles might be threatened by teamwork.

Nonetheless, there are examples of interprofessional practice that work. Most often, these models are found in a research or university setting, where professionals from various disciplines have come together in one institution or area of practice and teamwork has been able to flourish. Often, these successful practices are concentrated in one discipline—most commonly, graduates of health-related programs are involved in the interprofessional approaches—whereas other areas, like law or education, remain siloed. Where disciplines have converged in practice, success usually stems from teamwork being mandatory; practices need to be embedded in a culture that promotes shared goals among many team members; and respect for each profession's contributions. Shared goals are the most important aspect of collaborative practice. It is vital that all team members are working toward the same aim, whether it is keeping patients out of hospital or helping them deal with end-of-life issues. Even with well-meaning practitioners, a lack of mutual goals will lessen the chance for teamwork to flourish.

Interprofessional collaborations between professions with significantly different goals are usually unsuccessful. While team members almost always need to have mutual respect for each other, an appreciation for different perspectives and skill sets is not sufficient, and respect will often develop through time. When collaborative practice is entered into voluntarily, professionals usually enter with an appreciation for other fields. In general, collaborative practices result in more efficient healthcare with patients more satisfied with the service. Patient satisfaction figures are often used to sell interprofessional approaches, but the figures can be misleading: patients might appreciate the attention and time spent with team members—the “extra” care delivered—without ever realizing how much more efficient and effective their care has become. For this reason, it is better to speak about the impact of collaborative practice on healthcare rather than patient satisfaction. An expansion of team-based practices has begun, but it is often in a model trial phase, with attempts to collect evidence to support wider implementation, and many models highlighting the difficulties teams face in trying to implement care across professional boundaries. This is particularly true in healthcare, where education systems are rigidly compartmentalized and often siloed. Still, given the overwhelming evidence citing the benefits of interprofessional approaches, the success of team-based care should encourage disciplines to move away from more integrated systems in an effort to improve the quality of care delivered.



### 1.8 6. Ethical Considerations for Healthcare Professionals

Healthcare professionals are challenged by complex ethical issues and dilemmas in their practice. Often, such ethical challenges may arise due to conflict between a healthcare professional's legal obligations and their personal moral beliefs. Similarly, patient requests and/or expectations may challenge a healthcare professional's moral or ethical ground, as would differences in understanding or interpretation of healthcare laws and policies. These ethical dilemmas can take many forms, from the headstrong patient who refuses life-saving interventions to the desperately ill patient beseeching in an overdose of narcotics. Some ethical dilemmas may involve "in-house" conflicts of interest, as in the case of healthcare professionals challenged to perform examinations or tests on their own kin (O.K. Lategan, 2016).

Issues of beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy, and justice are generally thought to constitute the foundation of biomedical ethics; that is, they comprise the necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for an acceptable ethical framework for biomedicine. All staff involved in the care of a patient are obliged to act in the best interests of the patient, to pursue actions intended to benefit the patient (beneficence), and to prevent any potential harm (non-maleficence). Patient autonomy stresses the right of the patient to make their own decisions about their care, and justice assures equality of access to care and the fair distribution of health resources.

Healthcare professionals are expected to perform their duties bearing in mind the principles of good care, professional conduct, and ethics (Malau, 2007). Healthcare professionals are, therefore, expected to safeguard a patient's right to informed consent, patient confidentiality, and the provision of care. However, in practice, there may be situations in which safeguarding a patient's rights to confidentiality proves impossible. Professional practice may be challenged by situations whereby a patient has confided sensitive personal information. Such challenge may arise out of questionable disclosure of information provided by the patient, or the unanticipated need to disclose such information, for example, upon discovery of abusive treatment or misconduct upon or involving a patient. Such actions may jeopardize the trust vital to an effective patient-healthcare professional relationship.

Professional practice is further complicated by the influence of institutional policies on professional conduct and healthcare delivery. Healthcare professionals are often guided by policies established by the employing institutions. Institutional policies may safeguard professional conduct, but, in some instances, they may create paradoxes, loopholes, or grey areas that could lead to malpractice or unethical conduct. Furthermore, societal notions of right and morality also challenge ethical behavior. Decisions may be taken that are legally and/or ethically correct, but that could be viewed as morally unacceptable, or vice versa.

### 1.9 7. Healthcare Professional Burnout and Well-being

Burnout is a state of chronic stress that leads to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Batanda, 2024). Burnout is a growing concern among healthcare professionals, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic. Healthcare workers experienced high job demands, emotional exhaustion, fear for personal and family safety, and lack of support resources. Burnout affects the well-being of healthcare professionals and the quality of care they deliver. Health professionals rated themselves high, 8.44, on a scale 1-10 on quality care delivered, but they rated their peers, 6.83, low on the same scale. High burnout was reported among peers (37.35%) compared to self (19.12%) because burnout affects the ability to deliver empathetic

and good quality care. Health professionals are aware that burnout and poor well-being affect the quality of care delivered and suggest a need to build protective factors to improve personal well-being and care quality. Burnout is a quality care delivery concern.

Burnout is difficult to define for research and organizational purposes because it means different things for different professionals. To some, it is an individual problem needing personal resolution. To others, such as managers or researchers, it is an organizational problem associated with the organizational culture needing system change. However, it is generally agreed that burnout is a system phenomenon or a professional group's collective state. Dealing with burnout requires system changes to protect individuals (healthcare professionals). Empathy and the ability to care are difficult to sustain when one is overwhelmed by demands and fears. Burnout is an emotional state that develops slowly over time. The professionals involved showed how caring practices became less emphasized or impossible over time as the demands mounted and the fears deepened. In-service caring practices keep traumatized people composed and can counter trauma effects and fears from spreading, but the fears start to affect the care provider's ability to listen, comprehend, and do their work. Fears of inability to undertake routine tasks and concerns over credibility spread from care recipients to care providers and affect their understanding of the situation and ability to be composed. Moreover, caring is active involvement, and in a high-stress environment, there is a tendency to remove oneself from involvement and retreat, which affects the ability to listen to patients and communicate effectively. One healthcare professional suggested good quality care is delivered through words, direct communication, and involvement, which becomes difficult if "you feel the whole world is about to collapse." Burnout is a collective state because it spreads rapidly in groups. When one individual burnout cannot perform, it affects others' workloads, creating a chain of events where others also become overwhelmed with demands. Burnout mitigation should be group-oriented and focus on professionals as a group needing protection against external pressures.

#### 1.10 8. Training and Education for Healthcare Professionals

Training and education are vital in preparing healthcare professionals to fulfill their responsibilities in society. Quality care can only be delivered when health workers possess the appropriate technical knowledge and skills to undertake specific tasks. Therefore, both training and education, which together comprise the wider term professional development, are crucial elements of the quality care delivery equation. Strong healthcare professional training and education systems ensure the availability of providers with the necessary theoretical knowledge, as well as the ability to translate that understanding into practice. Over time, educational programs have evolved to provide health workers with the most relevant tools to perform their duties; however, emerging health needs often call for adjustments to existing curricula and the introduction of new topics (Cooke et al., 2011). Continuing professional development opportunities can also be implemented to address workforce gaps. In addition to specific technical skills, healthcare professionals require broader competencies, such as communication, leadership, and teamwork. These abilities are often fostered through interdisciplinary training, which should involve collaboration between different health disciplines from the outset to promote teamwork and communication earlier on in the training cycle. Despite the many benefits of these systems, healthcare education across countries currently faces challenges, including the relevance of curricula, accessibility, and the availability of educators.

Competence - the ability to perform a task to a defined standard - is usually acquired through a combination of theoretical and practical training. Although theory can be taught through lectures and seminars, hands-on training is essential for the development of practical skills. This could involve clinical practice with real patients or the use of simulators. Simulation-based training is increasingly being adopted in healthcare education, as it provides a safe environment in which trainees can build their skills without the risk of compromising patient safety. Furthermore, with the right resources, simulated training can be brought to low-resource settings. However, it is essential to ensure that infrastructure is in place and that training is adequately resourced, as health workers trained on substandard equipment may be unable to translate their skills to the workplace. On-the-job training is commonly implemented in low-resource settings and involves training in health facilities while working. Although this approach helps to rapidly increase the workforce in essential areas, a lack prior competency and skills may compromise the quality of care produced initially. Hands-on training is essential for the development of practical skills and should ideally be conducted in healthcare facilities, although this may not always be feasible. The use of simulators to provide training in hands-on skills is effective, especially in developing countries where access to healthcare facilities may be limited. When resources permit, low-cost models can also be constructed from locally sourced materials. In addition to formal training, the role of mentorship should not be overlooked. New graduates may have attended robust education programs, but without adequate support, they may struggle when entering the workforce. Mentorship not only helps instill confidence but also promotes continuous learning, which is essential for professional growth. Lifelong learning should be promoted as part of a health system's culture to keep personnel motivated and up to date with emerging trends.

### 1.11 9. Technological Advancements in Healthcare Practice

Technology is an integral part of everyday life and has changed the world significantly over the years. Everything from the way people travel to how people communicate has completely transformed because of technology. The impact of technology on today's life and different sectors is immense. One such sector being significantly influenced and transformed is healthcare practice. There is a plethora of technological innovations that have transformed the way patient care delivery is administered in recent years. Healthcare technology innovations such as electronic health records, health monitoring devices, telemedicine, and artificial intelligence are some of the innovations that have transformed the roles of healthcare professionals and the patient care delivery system (Reddy et al., 2022). These healthcare technologies have immensely benefitted the patients and healthcare institutions by making the patient care delivery system more efficient. Also, the emergence of healthcare technological innovations has improved accessibility to healthcare services, especially for rural areas where healthcare institutions are a distant dream.

Even though the technological innovations have benefitted patient care delivery in numerous ways, the integration of technology has also posed challenges for healthcare institutions and professionals. One of the challenges is the data privacy of the patients' health information. The risk of hacking is always prevalent in healthcare technological innovations, which makes the patients' health data vulnerable (M. Borycki & W. Kushniruk, 2022). In addition, there is the challenge of the 'digital divide', as a considerable population still does not have access to the internet or smartphones to utilize health technologies. It has also been found that the older population is usually less tech-savvy and so reluctant to use health technologies. Another challenge that technology brings is the need to train healthcare professionals to skillfully use the new technologies for population health management. Technology has modified roles and



responsibilities for healthcare professionals, which if not addressed will lead to misinterpretation of technologies and frustration for the professionals. Besides the above challenges, it is often vital to critically analyze the evolving relationship between technology and the human aspect of healthcare practice. Technology, at the end of the day, is a tool for enhancement but can also turn into a trigger for ethical dilemmas. Therefore, the need arises to examine the implications of technology on the roles, responsibilities, and interactions with patients of healthcare professionals.

### 1.12 10. Quality Improvement Initiatives in Healthcare Delivery

Various initiatives aimed at improving the quality of care delivered to patients in health care settings have been undertaken by both public and private stakeholders. Efforts to improve quality care delivery typically consist of a series of activities or strategies designed to evaluate and modify the delivery of health care services in order to increase their effectiveness. The delivery of quality health care is imperative to ensure good patient outcomes. Various quality improvement (QI) initiatives, both successful and unsuccessful, that aimed at improving the quality care delivered to patients in health care settings have been undertaken by both public and private stakeholders. Generally, QI initiatives consist of a series of activities or strategies designed to evaluate and modify the delivery of health care services in order to improve the quality care delivered to patients (A PonceVega, 2018). QI strategies typically follow established frameworks and models. One such widely used model is the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) model, which was created by physicist William Edwards Deming. Broadly, the PDSA model consists of four steps: planning a change aimed at improvement, including developing a theory; implementing the change; observing the consequences of the change, including rigorous data collection and analysis; and reflecting on the results, including considering whether to adapt, abandon, or adopt the change.

Generally, initiatives undertaken to improve the quality of care delivered to patients consist of a series of activities guided by a framework for QI. The first step in such frameworks typically involves identifying areas in which the quality of care delivered to patients can be improved and strategies to achieve such improvements. Generally, this is followed by the collection and analysis of data related to the proposed areas of improvement, which is used to rigorously assess current health care practices prior to implementing any modifications. Following this examination, a series of evidence-based practices aimed at improving the quality care delivered to patients are proposed and implemented. Finally, the new practices are monitored over time to ensure that the desired improvements in quality care delivery have been achieved. Usually, the monitoring of the new practices involves the continued collection and analysis of quantifiable data. Health care practices often involve the collection and analysis of a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data, such as patient outcomes and team dynamics. In addition to describing studies undertaken to improve the quality of care delivered to patients, the aforementioned frameworks and models for QI are also discussed. The involvement of health care professionals in the QI initiatives is also discussed, as well as how their involvement affects team dynamics.

### 1.13 11. Patient-Centered Care and the Role of Healthcare Professionals

Reflecting upon the passage of time, one recalls the golden moments spent amid family and friends or in natural surroundings, such as hills and rivers. These moments could be cherished evermore in life but would be enshrined in eternity, if only the time ceased its onward march. Such vicinity exudes elation of one's own existence. Conversely, the chaotic mindset would ensue, likely, in the company of a failing heart, helplessness, agony, grief, or loss. One feels shaken or lonely, as if trapped in the abyss of darkness. Such intricate experiences of human life need understanding and

empathy. However, pity has little relevance in such times; rather, the only necessity is care. The caring hand could, perhaps, be of a beloved family member or friend. If not, the assurance of medical care savors hope amid hopelessness. Without the assurance of care, health would be trivial and everything else rendered meaningless. Thereby, the notion of quality care is paramount in healthcare services (Verma, 2007). Playground and Hospital represent contrasting worlds. Nonetheless, one might find similar definitions of quality in both venues. In a healthcare setting, quality care is the harmony of the confluence of system, technology, procedures, and professionals concerning the patient. The system denotes the overarching structuring of various connected subsystems in the care service chain. Each subsystem comprises intricate facets, entailing complexity. Furthermore, each facet is multi-constituent with divergent perceptions of service quality. In this complexity, the outpatient clinic serves as a subsystem in the healthcare delivery chain. It is one of the principal gateways for patient entry into the healthcare system and ought to have well-articulated quality stipulations for optimal functionality. It is essential to accommodate patients as active constituents in the quality care discourse since their involvement is critical during the service delivery. Patients need to be educated and empowered to define quality care, as only then will the service providers comprehend the nuances of their expectations. Involvement in the care delivery process renders patients more aware of the intricacies of care services and the associated quality connotations, assisting them in voicing their perspectives. In so doing, patients are likely to exhibit increased vigilance by questioning or challenging care services. This, in turn, compels providers to be more diligent and accountable in their services. Moreover, well-defined quality stipulations on the part of the patients would aid in the proper implementation of care services that are otherwise at risk of being subverted due to their complexity and the involved need-based discretionary actions (Qureshi & Notebloom, 2017). Current paradigms of quality care are considered solely from the perspective of care providers. Hence, a vital question remains unexplored: How do patients perceive quality care?

#### 1.14 12. The Impact of Healthcare Professional Diversity on Patient Outcomes

Diversity among healthcare professionals is essential to patient outcomes. A diverse healthcare workforce increases cultural competency and enhances communication with patients from various backgrounds. Research indicates that a focus on diversity can mitigate health disparities (LeeShell Holliman Douglas, 2014). In the United States, while almost 30% of the population identifies as a racial or ethnic minority group, only 12% of doctors do. Unfortunately, this candidate pool is further narrowed by gender and sexual identity. To create a system that delivers equitable care, healthcare institutions must prioritize inclusive hiring practices. However, there are many barriers to achieving diversity in healthcare. The disparities often stem from systemic biases embedded in the education and hiring process. The lack of access to advanced education for minorities is apparent from an early age. These barriers to entry highlight the importance of hospitals and universities establishing mentorship and support networks for minority students. Further, it is critical that all healthcare professionals receive ongoing education on implicit bias and how it may affect their care delivery, even if unintentionally.

The healthcare profession has a moral obligation to foster diversity within its ranks. A commitment to diversity is not only ethical but also fosters better outcomes for all patients. Research suggests that having diverse healthcare teams leads to improved patient outcomes. Unfortunately, many students find themselves having to justify their existence or accomplishments. This is not only detrimental to the individual candidate but to the institutions as well. Placing students in a position where they have to rehash trauma to be seen as qualified discourages the future pursuit of education

in that field. Moreover, the perpetuation of this cycle ultimately limits the advancement of knowledge within that institution. In healthcare, it limits the ability to achieve the best outcomes for all patients. When patients interact with a provider from a similar racial background, they are more likely to trust that provider. However, patient trust is not solely reliant on the similarities in background. Overall, efforts to diversify the healthcare workforce must be amplified to ensure improved perceptions and better care for all patients.

### 1.15 13. Global Perspectives on Healthcare Professional Roles

Health and healthcare are global issues and each health system is embedded within a particular context of politics, culture, society, economy and history. Nevertheless, many health systems share similar challenges and concerns, for example in the area of workforce planning. The health workforce is the most important resource in a health system. Sufficient numbers of health workers with the right mix of skills and competencies, who are appropriately distributed and effectively managed, are a prerequisite for high quality health care delivery ((Antoinette) de Bont et al., 2016).

At the global level, the WHO has set standards and benchmarks for health workforce planning in order to guide countries in addressing their workforce challenges. But how to translate these common standards to the local context? This representation of the global theme of health workforce takes the perspective of healthcare professionals and focuses on the professional roles of the workforce. Professional roles are a balance between tasks and competencies, responsibilities and autonomy, and are shaped by education, regulation and agreements between the employers and the professionals. They embed the expectations society has of a profession. However, the interpretation of professional roles, and thus the expectations of a profession, can vary across cultures and systems.

At the most basic level, countries differ in the number and the kind of health professional roles. But even when the same roles exist in a health system, they can diversify in their interpretation and thus different professional arrangements can be observed. Professional roles are dynamic and subject to reconfiguration. Change can arise at the local level, for example in response to new organisational policies, but change can also arise at the global level, for example in response to a pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected healthcare systems across the world and has re-shaped the roles and responsibilities of many healthcare professionals. It can trigger local change as countries learn from each other and professionals reconsider their roles against a common global benchmark.

### 1.16 14. The Future of Healthcare Professional Roles

Technological, social, political, and economic changes and innovations will shape how healthcare professional roles will look in the future (Schiavone & Ferretti, 2021). It is anticipated that responsibilities will shift as innovations emerge, policies change, and patient needs evolve. The impact of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation will be deliberated for traditional roles. The practice of healthcare professionals will be examined in light of telehealth and virtual care, considering what is needed to adjust roles effectively. As the healthcare environment continuously changes, adaptability and ongoing learning will be emphasized so that preparations can be made for future demands or challenges. Attention will also be placed on what opportunities may arise in the future. Discussion will include how interdisciplinary collaboration might help ensure that practices are shaped to meet patient needs adequately.

Roles within healthcare are always changing, driven by various factors. To effectively address current patient needs, these roles must continuously adapt to new processes and innovations. New technologies and processes in care delivery and management impact the practice of healthcare professionals. While new methods can improve quality care delivery, these changes can be disruptive and difficult to navigate. To ensure changes foster positive adjustments that meet patient needs, it is important to consider how roles will change in light of emerging technologies, processes, and policies. It is crucial to clearly define how roles will need to adjust to implement new processes successfully. It is also important to contemplate the opportunities or challenges roles may face due to the ongoing pace of change, as aspects may need to be reconsidered. Technologies that may impact roles have been selected, and guidance is provided to contemplate future adjustments.

### 1.17 15. Conclusion and Future Directions

Throughout this essay, the key elements influencing the roles of healthcare professionals in the delivery of quality care have been discussed. Reflecting on the history of professional roles in care and the present developments that might influence these roles in the future provides a better understanding of the complex situation healthcare professionals are facing ((Arend R.) van Stenis et al., 2017). Even though the professional roles of care providers are under continuous scrutiny and presently being reshaped by many processes, there might still be a solid core and a promise for the future. Care providers, in upbringing and in their professional life, embrace and give meaning to their roles in a caring-delivering relation with clients and patients. This caring-delivering relationship is built on and expanded by trust, goodwill, responsibility, and ethics, enhanced by education and training.

Quality care is delivered in partnership between healthcare professionals and patients, based on mutual trust and interprofessional collaboration (Bhardwaj, 2022). However, interprofessional collaboration takes time to develop and is fragile, easily disturbed by a single person's negligence. This means that quality care rests on the sum of actions by individual healthcare professionals, making their professional roles essential. Current changes in society, care organizations, and professional education influence the interpretation of these professional roles. These roles are under scrutiny, partly from within the professions but also, and perhaps more emphatically, from outside the professions. Professional accountability, liability, and freedom have become widely debated subjects in society at large. Moreover, healthcare professionals often feel that the foundations of their professions are being eroded by external pressures. Care delivery is complex and each healthcare professional might interpret their role in care delivery in a different way. Nonetheless, the focus should remain on the patient.

As the pandemic demonstrated, there is a need to rethink how to create a resilient workforce and to assure patient safety and quality of care while promoting the well-being of healthcare professionals. Policies and actions are needed at all levels, from the EU to the Member States, Regions, and healthcare organizations. Individual healthcare professionals should also reflect and act upon their roles in the present situation. Research and exploration are needed into the effectiveness of actions undertaken with respect to quality care and the roles of healthcare professionals in care delivery. Moreover, the future is still open. There will be innovations in care delivery and education, and new technology will change and shape procedures and practices. New legislation will be enacted concerning data management and privacy. Diversity and inclusivity

should be fostered rather than taken for granted. All stakeholders in healthcare systems, but especially care providers, should be committed to these developments.

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