
**INTERDISCIPLINARY HEALTH CARE TEAMS:
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METAPHORICAL VIEWS OF HEALTH CARE TEAMS: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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Introduction

Like the organizations in which they function, interdisciplinary health care teams are complex entities. Based on their training, health professionals have different values and views of their roles on teams (Qualls & Czirr, 1988). Different branches of health care produce different types of teams which operate under a variety of team models, e.g., rehabilitation teams, geriatrics teams, psychiatric teams, and surgical teams. To further complicate matters, it is likely that individuals, based on their personalities, have differing views of teams and diverse expectations for teams. Even health professionals who are not members of teams harbor images of teams based on past and current encounters with them.

Despite the strong case for diversity of perceptions, the concept of "team" as unidimensional and universally understood has evolved as an unquestioned paradigm (Drinka & Ray, 1992). This phenomenon might partially be attributed to the health care literature and its lack of rigor in demanding precise definitions or common descriptors for different types of teams in health care settings. Limited funding for health care team research may be a related factor. However, the metaphors used by health professionals are readily attainable, might provide clues to their perceptions of teams, and in turn might help us understand how different teams function.

Metaphors have been defined as the application of a name or descriptive term to something to which it is not literally applicable (Renton, 1990). Metaphors may be useful vehicles for eliciting team definitions from health professionals. Apps (1985) believes that metaphors evoke meaning and feeling without explanation and that they reflect insight. Scheffler (1960) acknowledged that a metaphor may be limited but that it could be supplemented by the perspectives of other metaphors. Determining how metaphors are used by health professionals could elucidate the unquestioned paradigm of "team".

Sports metaphors are abundant in common usage, are often used as examples in organizational team training (Martin, 1994), and have recently been used to describe different models of health care teams (Spiegel, Torres, & Buckingham, 1992). However, health professionals may not identify their teams with sports metaphors, or may not uniformly identify their team with a given sports metaphor. If health professionals identify more with non sports metaphors, then, using sports metaphors as examples in training health professionals is questionable. In relation to teams, it is not known if health professionals apply any type of metaphor more than others. Metaphors have been investigated as they apply to medicine (Vaisrub, 1977). However, to our knowledge, the application of metaphors to health care teams has not been investigated.

This exploratory study is an attempt to expose some of the metaphors that health professionals use to define health care teams. It is also an attempt to investigate whether health professionals apply sports metaphors to health care teams and what sports metaphors they use. If these definitions could be reiterated and understood it might help to prepare health professionals for the practice of teamwork.

Methods

This study used a convenience sample of health professionals from 4 Veterans Affairs Hospitals (one acute care, one neuropsychiatric and two acute and long term care) in three midwestern states.

These individuals attended seminars or workshops in 1994 on interdisciplinary health care team development or on issues related to team effectiveness. The authors distributed and collected the questionnaires at the beginning of the seminar or workshop.

Quality of Team Metaphors

Metaphors were defined on the questionnaires as *giving a name to something that belongs to something else*. In addition to the identifiers of gender, profession, and length of time in a profession, participants were asked three questions in the following order: 1) What metaphors do you think of when you think of health care teams? 2) What sports metaphor would you apply to a health care team? and 3) What sports metaphor would you have used at the end of your professional training? The first question was intended to be a general statement about health care teams. The intent of the second question was to focus professionals on a team that they knew well. Presumably the team that they knew best was the team(s) of which they were currently a member. The third question attempted to explore whether their perception of "health care team" had changed since the end of their formal training.

Study Questions

Several questions guided the study: 1) Of the general metaphors applied to health care teams, will more respondents identify nonsport than sport metaphors?; 2) Are male health professionals more likely than female health professionals to apply a sports metaphor to a health care team?; 3) Do the sports metaphors that health professionals apply to health care teams change after they complete their training? To examine these questions, the data was analyzed by gender, profession, and years of professional experience.

Sports metaphors were identified according to a dictionary of sports metaphors (Palmatier & Ray, 1989) which liberally interpreted the term sports to include *three-ring circus* and numerous children's games. Nonsports metaphors were those that did not pertain to sports as identified in the metaphor dictionary.

Identification of Themes

All metaphors and their elaborations were studied for themes and additional questions emerged from that analysis. The data was analyzed by the positive and negative aspects of team metaphors as reflected in either qualifiers used or from general use. The authors agreed on the qualitative categories of the responses. Also, during coding, the authors were blinded to gender, profession, or length of time in a profession. Sports metaphors listed in response to the second survey question were tabulated according to sport or grouping of sports.

Findings

Description of the Respondents

One hundred twenty-five individuals completed or partially completed surveys. The numbers reported for each question differ because some respondents did not answer every question and some respondents gave more than one response per question. Demographics on the participants are in Appendix A.

Respondents represented nine teams—one adult day care, one nursing home rehabilitative team, one intermediate psychiatry team, two acute psychiatry teams, an outpatient team, a home care team, and two geriatric evaluation and management teams.

Responses to Study Questions

In response to the first study question, several participants were not able to identify any metaphors. Of 115 individuals answering question one, 29 listed sports and 86 listed nonsports metaphors. In response to the second study question, analysis of the data by Chi Square (Table 1) revealed no difference between males and females in the identification of sports metaphors.

Table 1

Preference for applying sports metaphors to health care teams

	Sport	Nonsport
Male	6	23
Female	22	64

Chi Square Analysis: $X^2 = 0.2817$; $df = 1$; NS

In response to the third study question, 75 individuals identified sports metaphors that they would have applied to teams at the end of their training. Those metaphors were matched with the individual's responses to the second survey question. The answers of 64 of the 75 respondents represented differences in the metaphors that they would have used at the end of training as compared to metaphors they currently applied to health care teams. Three of the eleven individuals who did not report changes had been out of training less than four years. Recalling the completion of training, one individual described "Figure skating - all beauty graceful and smooth with a few falls now and then. (Little did I know!)". In response to the second survey question, this person had listed a skating metaphor with a very different connotation, "a hockey team - there are fights within a team and between teams. There can be bruises (ego and physical) and disagreements, etc. but in the end it's through team effort that wins". Another respondent referred to teams at the completion of training as "love 2". This same individual currently refers to teams as "a tug of war". The most common sports metaphors applied to the end of training was that of "rookie". One individual further qualified this term as "rookie - in the triple A farm league".

Metaphorical Themes

When applying metaphors to health care teams, participants in the study identified a total of 160 nonsports and 173 sports metaphors. Participants gave explanations for some of the metaphors and a qualitative analysis of those metaphors that were either elaborated, explained, or had a common meaning revealed fifteen themes (Appendix B). Eleven of the 15 themes had a mix of sports and non sports metaphors.

Metaphors as Judge

Many metaphors appeared to have judgmental qualities about them. Those qualities were classified as all positive, all negative, uncertain or neutral, or mixed positive and negative.

-*Positive*. Metaphors accompanied by an explanation that was clearly positive were included in this category. Some examples of *positive* metaphors are "large machine - with integrated functional parts",

"track & field - all members do something different to achieve a common patient goal", or "fishing - calming and relaxing". Metaphors not accompanied by descriptors but which are commonly used in a positive manner, e.g., "strong", "two animals pulling a cart together", or "solid" were also included in this category.

Negative. This category included metaphors for which the explanation was clearly negative as it would be applied to a health care team. Examples of negative metaphors are "a group of unorganized people", "bowling - someone is always knocking you down", "a group of people playing hot potato", and "a bunch of unfriendly quarterbacks - too many directors, too few do-ers". Metaphors which were not clarified but which are usually used in a negative manner, e.g., volcano, demolition derby, chaos, boxing were also coded in this category.

Uncertain or neutral. Metaphors accompanied by little or no explanation were given this classification. Unless they were commonly used in a negative or positive manner as part of general usage, it was difficult to determine the meaning that a respondent ascribed to a particular metaphor. An example of this was the metaphor of a basketball team, "lots of passing back and forth". If this refers to information it might be seen as a positive comment. If it refers to patients it might be viewed as negative. If the metaphor encompassed both images it could be considered a mixed metaphor. Because of the limited explanation, the category is uncertain.

Mixed. This category included metaphors in which the explanation had both a positive and a negative aspect e.g., "family - we didn't choose to be together, but we're together and have to get the job done - everyone has responsibilities and we can all share in each other's achievements; not without conflict", "crunchy peanut butter - smooth sticks together but obstacles (conflict)", "Rose - we all have the ultimate goal (the flower) but there are a lot of ruff edges to get there", "football - use 'protective' equipment; to win must utilize everyones expertise", or "nurse as goalie". Metaphors which were not clarified but were commonly considered to have more than one view e.g., "melting pot", were also coded as *mixed* metaphors.

Results of grouping metaphors by quality were: positive=109; negative=91; neutral/uncertain=144; and mixed=63. There were mixed judgments applied to every sport. Metaphors reflected both broad and narrow aspects of sports teams, e.g., "hockey-playing short compromises efforts, puts pressure on other team member" or "hockey-a goal in mind" reflect broad views of the sport. Whereas, "nurse is goalie" or "a bunch of unfriendly quarterbacks" reflect narrow or specific aspects of sports. Rather than providing a metaphor with mixed qualities, some individuals provided numerous metaphors-some positive and some negative.

Types of Sports Metaphors used to Describe Health Care Teams

Sports metaphors are listed according to frequency of response to the second survey question (Appendix C). The sport of football was the most commonly listed sports metaphor. The perceptions of football ranged from very positive to very negative. Numerous references were made to the quarterback and to the physician as quarterback (most often by a physician). Basketball appeared to be viewed as the most positive sports metaphor. There were no negative qualifiers listed for basketball. The negative aspects that were elaborated for basketball only occurred in conjunction with positive images; while most other sports had a variety of positive and/or negative qualifiers. Baseball had only a few negative qualifiers and appeared to represent a multidisciplinary approach e.g., "everyone has a job to do"; "occasionally someone hits a home run". Soccer was often depicted as having equality among players. Other sports like football recognized that players had different skills and positions and some players, like the quarterback, might assume more importance in the game because of their particular skill or position on the team. Hockey had many negative qualifiers, e.g., "playing shorthanded", "patient as puck", and "fighting".

In spite of the identifiable characteristics of each sport, it was clear that sports metaphors sometimes held different meaning for different individuals, e.g., football as "a lot of egos bumping into one

another" vs. football as "each player has his/her responsibility, all have a common goal. Team players are interdependent" or "coordinator, nurse, or patient as goalie" vs. "patient as puck".

Discussion

Our results demonstrate that the health professionals who participated in this study were more likely to apply non sports than sports metaphors to health care teams. Also, there was no difference between male and female preference for sports or non sports metaphors. Ritti, (1994) noted that the purpose of metaphors, especially sports metaphors, is to reaffirm the belief system and values that support the hierarchy of the organization's leadership. Perhaps this explains the popularity of using sports metaphors in organizational team development. The application of sports metaphors to general team theory may also be popular because sports have defined rules and one of the most prominent theories of organizations has been based on man as machine. However, the results of this study indicate that sports metaphors may not always be the best examples to use in training health care teams.

Despite the apparent preference for nonsports metaphors, many health professional readily applied sports metaphors to health care teams when they were asked to do so. Football metaphors were by far, the most commonly applied metaphors. In football, players line up and constantly defend a line. The quarterback calls the plays on the field and functions as the team leader. In football there are special teams and an offensive player does not play defense. Thus players never play the whole game. In short, football represents a multidisciplinary team with one defined leader.

Several other sports metaphors were also frequently mentioned. Endurance sports formed one of these groups. Endurance metaphors included long distance running and swimming. It also included relays and the sense of handing off a baton (patient/problem) to another player. Another interpretation of this group may be that of the pressure of performing and the focus on individuals skills as part of a group effort.

Basketball was the sport metaphor that appeared to best represent the interdisciplinary team approach. It is notable that basketball is characterized by a relatively small team; players potentially play the whole game; each player knows what the other is doing; players are not equal but all have an integral role to play; players must work together while constantly changing their strategy; players learn their roles and patterns of behavior but are constantly improvising; and players play the whole court. Basketball is very much like organized chaos with ten people constantly circling each other.

In baseball everyone has a job to perform in a zone with implied limited boundaries. In only special circumstances does a player back up another position. There tend to be heros and superheros, much like a consultation team in health care.

This study provided no evidence of a universal metaphor for health care teams. Although no universal metaphor emerged, the study identified fifteen themes that respondents applied to health care teams. Some themes like chaos/conflict, physically/emotionally demanding, speed, and group insufficiency contained a mix of sports and non sports metaphors. Other themes like hand offs, everyone has individual job..., triumphs, and leadership contained mostly sports metaphors. The remaining themes of dynamic organism, weather, synergism, team as machine, music, learning, and fear contained primarily non sports metaphors. This gives some indication that certain types of metaphors may be more appropriate than others for use in discussing certain aspects of team. It might also indicate that some topics, like leadership, are more understood in the context of the authoritarian sports metaphors. This study also provided some evidence that the team metaphors that health professionals develop during their training years may change when they assume clinical responsibilities as full fledged health professionals.

There was evidence of dimension and complexity within individual metaphors and within individual responses. However, a larger number of health professionals identified unidimensional metaphors for health care teams. This might indicate that those responders had an elementary knowledge of teams; a primarily negative or positive past experience with teams; or might reflect an individual's unique reaction to

current circumstances that were occurring on his or her affiliated team. It could also reflect a team member's response to a team that was stuck in a particular mode of interaction. A mixed response, on the other hand, might reflect more maturity and understanding of the fluctuations that a normal team endures as it develops and maintains itself.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by the use of survey forms which had all three questions. The presence of the sports metaphor questions could have biased individual responses to the first survey question in favor of either sports or non sports metaphors. An additional limitation of the study was the inability to clarify meanings of metaphors when no elaboration was given. It is dangerous to judge qualities of a metaphor based on face-value perceptions because they might encompass complex meanings that are individually held.

Questions to Guide Further Study

Several questions arise for further study. Under what circumstances do team members share the same metaphors? Are the metaphors used by teams in early developmental phases different than those used by members of teams in later phases of development; and are there common themes they apply to those phases of development? Do team members act out the culture that is implied by their metaphors, e.g., chaos/conflict, hand-offs, or winning/losing?

Conclusions

Lakoff & Johnson (1980) emphasized that metaphors reinforce themselves by creating social realities and by guiding future action. By using a non literal verbal expression, metaphors provide a shared frame of reference and make it possible to transfer knowledge from one situation to another (Ross 1985). Since unquestioned paradigms are often the foundation for applying metaphors to a particular phenomenon, metaphors are usually not exposed but are taken for granted by the sender and receiver.

The use of metaphors by members of health care teams has broad implications for training. Since team members bring metaphors to a team from their past experience, it is likely that newer team members will harbor different metaphors than longer term team members. A consultant/trainer should be able to help a team recognize and evaluate its metaphors and provide opportunities to capitalize on functional ones and to reconstruct individual or commonly held dysfunctional ones.

The metaphors that team members use should encompass the dynamic nature of teams and those commonly held metaphors should change as the team develops or regresses. By thinking in and employing metaphors in their work, health professionals construct their own definitions of health care teams. Exposing metaphors is important because making them explicit allows the questioning of unquestioned paradigms, enhances the accuracy of communication between members and allows the metaphors to be used by others for the team's benefit. If we can discover the metaphors that health professionals are applying to health care teams, perhaps we can help to shape the dynamic theory of health care team development.

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Appendix A

Demographics

N = 125

Gender

Male = 30

Female = 92

No response = 3

Profession

Nurse = 68

Social Worker = 13

MD = 12

OT/PT = 10

Psychologist = 6

Pharmacist = 5

Dietitian/Nutrition = 2

Speech Pathologist = 1

Journalist = 1

Biomathematician = 1

Social Gerontologist = 1

Music Therapist = 1

Health Care Technician = 1

Medical Instrumentation Technician = 1

Length in practice

Mean = 15.6 years

Range = 1 - 41 years

Member of health care team

Yes = 114

No = 7

No response = 4

Appendix B Metaphorical Themes

Chaos/conflict

never ending battle
battle
unorganized
ball of confusion-no one knows own responsibility
cat fight
"Ram" treatment down people's throats
tug of war
demolition derby
cutthroat-that's what goes on here
dumping ground-anything that needs to be done gets dumped on nursing
crunchy peanut butter-smooth sticks together but peanuts represent conflict
"Rumbles Debating Society"
football team-no rule book, no cheerleaders, goals posts keep moving around play
breaks down
hitter makes mistakes while everyone watches
bows and arrows
air hockey-one on one
Indy 500-occasional crash
football-turf issues, tackle from no where, teamed against each other
hockey-fights within and between teams
bowling-someone always knocking you down

Hand offs/passing back and forth

hand off the beeper
volleyball
hockey-patient was puck, patient care passed back and forth
nurse as goalie
relays-everyone runs part of the race and hands off baton to the next
tennis-different disciplines volley back and forth to reach common goal
soccer-kick things back and forth
football-information needs to be passed, passing off responsibility
basketball-lots of passing back and forth
passing the ball - everyone thinks someone else is taking care of the problem; there's always someone there to pass on things for you to complete or pass on.
kick back and forth
keep the ball in the air
playing hot potato

Physically / emotionally demanding

never ending
constantly on the go
long distance runner
swimming the English Channel
roller derby
games in overtime - because if often seems there is not enough time for each
patient
sink or swim
sea sick
movie "Ground Hog Day"
mountain climbing

fishing-calming and relaxing, hopeful for a catch
barefooted-many responsibilities, limited time to relax and few resources
driving on ice
trudging up a steep hill with lots of cliffs

Everyone has individual job to do-but contribute to team

track-each does something different to achieve common goal
golf
baseball-each has a distinct job which is best fulfilled when working smoothly
with other teams members
gobots-all technical but must pull together to accomplish goals
assembly line
cheerleaders
darts
sports team - different positions have different roles, team can't succeed without
each role and team can't win without most roles doing their part right.
basketball-each member has own strength and rely on each other to score points
football-all are totally dependent on one another for success
family - didn't choose to be together, have a job to do, responsibilities, share
achievements, conflict.
working together - takes team work to win games and to help client win their
game with their health.
varsity team - some of the best players (health care professionals) team up.

Triumphs/winning and losing/ ups and downs

for every winner there must be a loser
to win - doing the best to our ability/knowledge and win
go for the gold
hole-in-one
touchdown
football-big guy knocks down little guy, winning-losing battle, use protective
equipment to win
team sport -everyone functions towards a common goal, i.e.. optimal health care
for a patient, working together toward a common goal of winning.
hurdles
mountain climbing
do or die
grand slam home run
bike ride up and down hill
I hit a home run and it's finished for the time being

Dynamic organism (Interdependent/integrated)

plant
garden
tree
rose
anthill
team that works together as one
basketball-everybody depends on each other to do their part in the game as a
whole, depend on each other for set ups
animals pulling together
geese flying south
summer garden-each plant and flower has individual beauty and purpose but part
of whole picture
kaleidoscope

football-all are totally dependent on one another for success
rippling effect of stone thrown in pond
living organism-if any organ not functioning properly team becomes sick
bunch of clowns-all was choreographed

Speed

race car driver
racing-run through everything as fast as possible to get on with your work
ball of snow rolling downhill
hurry up and wait
Indy 500
traffic in the city-going at own speed and taking wrong turns
pit stop
horse race
auto race-fast moving, quick action, yellow flag, pit stop so everyone works to
ready car

Weather/geological forces/no control

4 seasons
wind-sometimes calm, sometimes gusty, needs to be monitored
active volcanoes-the health care teams tend to be very explosive, constantly
disagreeing
downhill skier with no poles
rivers
desert sand shifting to form something new
ship at sea-sink or swim, smooth sailing or storms
whirlwind of activity
mountain
fall between cracks-everyone thinks someone else is taking care of problems
tree-bends and moves with the wind
Iowa weather

Group (insufficiency, lacking something)

dysfunctional family
group of disorganized people
game - just beginning
absent father (MD)
kids game - red light, green light or Simon says, Duck, duck, goose (one person
always left out)
hockey-playing short handed
croquet, cricket-don't understand the rules
croquet-each part of the team is represented by the brackets that you have to hit
the ball through; sometimes you just can't get the other team members to follow through or
cooperate or work together as a team thus the ball cannot get through the bracket and the game
can't be won
one man always out and non participative (MD)

Leadership

collection of egos looking to Billy Martin for leadership
quarterback (MD)
teamwork with good coaches
mountain-large base with stacked leadership and physician at top
soccer-balance of power and importance
eight horse chariot-whose in charge and where are we going

stalemate-in checkers no one makes a move to work until someone takes the first initiative
demolition derby-everyone is trying to take the lead and ends up in one big pile of scrap
football-one unique highly paid aloof leader (MD) and many not so noticed hard workers
a bunch of unfriendly quarterbacks-too many directors, too few doers

Synergism

bicycle wheel
patient at center
a wheel-one team member as hub
planetary system, universe
group quilt-sometimes quite beautiful when all put together but goes thru phases of intrigue, promise, and ugliness to get there
salad
loaf of bread from bread machine
melting pot
interdisciplinary

Team as machine or craftsman

well oiled machine
engine being overhauled by high school shop class
body shop
refinishing antiques
auto
engine
large machine with integrated functional parts

Music

symphony orchestra
band performance
piece of music
music-same tune sometime
bar with loud band playing

Learning

X-ray
think tank
school-continuing learning experience
kindergarten class

Fear

monster
Medusa - snake-haired monster which avoids self-reflection
den of lions - cubs on one side, adults on the other

Appendix C

Sports metaphors listed as current metaphors for health care team

N=189

Sports Metaphor	Number
Football	38
Relays/track & field running/swimming	16
Basketball	15
Team	13
Baseball	13
Soccer	12
Hockey/air hockey/skating	9
Auto race/demo derby	7
Children's games	6
Volleyball	6
Croquet	6
Games	4
Wrestling	4
Other ¹ (boxing, tennis, golf, darts, fishing, skiing, biking, bowling, cricket, pool, checkers, tug of war, hit or miss, ball, fast pace, play, player, mountain climbing, 3 ring circus, cheers, hand off)	40

¹each of these sports was listed fewer than four times

ATTITUDES OF STUDENTS AND PRECEPTORS TOWARD INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM PRACTICE*

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Introduction

Interdisciplinary team practice has been used for decades to care for high risk populations; however, Interdisciplinary Training Grants for Rural Areas have brought a new emphasis on this concept. While interdisciplinary which I will refer to as InterD, teams may be a way of life for some practitioners, particularly physicians, who have been trained to provide comprehensive care independently with little collaboration with others. This paper explores the attitudes and perceptions of students about interdisciplinary team practice using the Interdisciplinary Education Perception Scale before and after they experienced an inter-d didactic course, a rural clinical experience, or both.

Background

The Wisconsin Consortium for Interdisciplinary Training in Rural Areas received grant funding in July 1993. The Consortium seeks to provide interdisciplinary education to students in the clinical pharmacy, nursing, social work, and the physician assistant program on the University campus by providing inter-d clinical experiences at rural training sites and offering a 2 credit course.

The course is taught by a representative from each of the four disciplines, guest speakers, community faculty, and practitioners from rural areas. The objectives of the course are:

1. To increase understanding and appreciation for interdisciplinary team practice and its importance in rural primary care settings.
2. To introduce health professions students to the unique aspects of health care in rural areas.
3. To increase student awareness of the principles of community-oriented primary care practice, including the various roles, skill and activities that constitute primary care.

This paper reviews the process used to evaluate the first course objective. A systematic evaluation provides the faculty with valuable information for modifications and changes in future courses and clinical experiences.

Methods

A pre-/post-test design was used. Students enrolled in the "Interdisciplinary Rural Primary Health Care Practice" course at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the clinical training site in

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