

Teamwork: A Necessary Requirement For Success

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Members of the Academy, fellow perfusionists, ladies and gentlemen; It is an honor and privilege to be here today to deliver the Thomas G. Wharton Memorial Lecture, which I have titled "Teamwork: A Necessary Requirement For Success". I am truly humbled to have been given this responsibility by the membership of the Academy.

We recognize Tom Wharton for his significant contributions in the early years as perfusion was being shaped into a profession. Although Tom was not a perfusionist, he provided leadership by serving as the Executive Director of the American Society of Extra-Corporeal Technology (AmSECT) and Editor of its journal, as well as serving on the American Board of Cardiovascular Perfusion. Unselfishly, Tom provided encouragement and support of the perfusion community which led to the formation of this Academy, dedicated to perfusion education. Sadly, Tom Wharton died of a heart attack at the age of 46, just months before his vision became a reality. We are all fortunate to have had Tom on our team.

For those of us gainfully employed as perfusionists or students in training, we are currently faced with challenges related to healthcare reform and economics. This is nothing new. In fact, in the 1st Wharton Lecture in 1984, Charlie Reed discussed the impact of managed care, evolving technologies that would result in a decline in open heart surgery and the need for our profession "to make tough choices". For the most part, our profession has risen to the occasion.

Healthcare today requires an inter-professional team effort, especially as cases become more complex. Communication, cooperation and coordination are essential to delivering effective care, especially in cardiac surgery. For those of us working in the OR, this should seem obvious. As vital members of the open heart team, we perfusionists work in one of the most technically challenging settings in medicine.

Although it has been just over a decade since the landmark Institute of Medicine Report "To Err is Human" highlighted teamwork as a mechanism for enhancing or hindering safety and quality of care, how much has really changed in the OR setting? Avoidable human errors in medicine have been estimated to cost between 8 and 16 billion dollars per year. Communication, a core component of

teamwork, is still cited as the root cause in nearly 70% of sentinel events according to recent Joint Commission statistics.

What is teamwork? Noted philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie, described it as "the ability to work together toward a common vision. It is the ability to direct individual accomplishments towards organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to obtain uncommon results". In theory, teamwork sounds very simple. In practice, it can be very difficult because it requires a level of discipline, commitment and effort.

We all have mental images and experiences of what successful teamwork looks like. Allow me to share a few. In 2008, Coach Mike Krzyzewski, fondly known as Coach K by loyal Duke Basketball fans, led a group of highly talented, professional athletes; and by building a foundation of trust, shared standards and a shared vision, brought home the gold medal in Men's Basketball at the Beijing Olympics. Just having the most talented members on a team does not guarantee success.

On January 15, 2009, flying with two dead engines, Captain Chesley Sullenberger safely landed US Airways Flight 1549 on the Hudson River shortly after take off. Experience, simulation training and icy calm leadership allowed all of the passengers and crew to walk away from a potentially disastrous ending. In a recent television special on the anniversary of this event, Captain Sully highlighted the importance of the training he received while a student cadet at the Air Force Academy.

Upon graduating, my first three years in perfusion were wisely spent by remaining at the Texas Heart Institute. I got to experience first hand, how, with everyone working together, we could do more than 4,800 open heart procedures a year. It was a model in efficiency. Another important lesson I gained was by observing pioneering surgeons like Dr Denton Cooley, who never seemed to fear failure. He always worked with grace and poise. Perfusionists were never targets of his frustration. With Charlie Reed, the message to the students was simply to learn and do your job well, and not to make excuses, key elements of team success. My classmates were phenomenal, we cared and watched out for each other. We celebrated successes and suffered letdowns together. When I first arrived at Duke

Hospital in late December, 1986, I felt a little overwhelmed with limited perfusion and some on the job management training under my belt. Fortunately, I had an incredible advocate and supporter in Dr. David Sabiston, the Chairman of the Department of Surgery. Dr Sabiston supported me with repeated encouragement and emphasized the importance of pride and tradition. His support of perfusion included resources for hiring and relocating staff, continuing education and promoting our professional image to the physicians and hospital administrators. I will be forever indebted to this great man for supporting my team. Never underestimate the influence of positive mentoring.

Three years ago, I found myself assembling an operating room team for a very important assignment. Once this “dream team” was assembled, I assumed the role as the patient. For those who know me, patient would not have been a term used to describe me. My confidence in this team of professionals caring for me while I had open heart surgery was tremendous. This team came together and did what they were trained to do every day. They communicated well, gave 100% focus to the patient and did so with care and compassion. There were countless other individuals and professionals that helped as well, as part of their “job”. It made me more fully appreciate how much cardiopulmonary bypass has improved since I first entered the field, as a result of collective teamwork. Wouldn’t you expect the same? Shouldn’t every patient we encounter expect the very same level of care from a high-performing team?

Teamwork in healthcare has been linked with important patient outcomes. Recent literature associates teamwork with reduced postoperative morbidity and improved patient satisfaction scores; important benchmarks in today’s competitive environment. Additional benefits have also been noted with job satisfaction and job stress.

The challenge facing hospitals and providers today is how to turn a group of experts in their clinical fields into expert teams. Team training, already adopted by the aviation industry is slowly catching on in healthcare. Some of the barriers relate to the difficulty with measuring teamwork and linking it to patient safety outcomes. Attitudes among the various team members can also be very influential with accepting or rejecting this concept. However, organizational success with improving heart surgery, via a human factors approach, as recently reported by the Mayo Clinic, provides direction and encouragement for us to do the same.

Where do we start in perfusion? Currently the training programs do not cover team training in their curriculum. It should be incorporated into clinical simulation training and provide a foundation to build

on. Next, employers should pay closer attention to the behaviors and attitudes in new hires that would enable successful team interaction. No amount of technical expertise will substitute for the right attitude. Finally, all departments and programs should take the initiative to understand and value the leadership requirements associated with teamwork. Then it needs to be practiced, so it becomes engrained in our culture.

Our profession continues to evolve, both in adopting new technologies and with our scope of practice. The application of minimally invasive or “stealth” perfusion, to be done safely, requires a coordinated effort. Changing our practice to an Evidence Based Approach requires collaboration. Expanding our role outside of our comfort zone in cardiac surgery to areas such as blood management, cardiac assist devices, ECMO and surgical oncology, to name a few, will provide opportunities for us to become members of different teams. It will also provide some of you with opportunities for demonstrating leadership on these teams. Leadership in teamwork doesn’t require a title like Chief or a series of credentials, just the right attitude and the knowledge and understanding of the desired goals.

What is the role of the Academy in fostering teamwork? Our Constitution states that the single purpose of the Academy “shall be to encourage and stimulate investigation and study which will increase the knowledge of cardiovascular perfusion, and to correlate and disseminate such knowledge”. We should meet this challenge by developing leadership training in teamwork and begin to study and report out on it’s impact to our practices. We need to ensure that our focus is always to do what is best for our patient.

I will leave you with a quote from Henry Ford; “Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.”

Teamwork is the necessary requirement for success. I have been blessed to be part of so many great teams over the years. None have been more important to me than my family. To my wife, Sheila, who is here today, thanks for always believing in me and for your love, patience and support. To our partners in the Manufacturing Industry, we are indebted to your commitment with improving patient safety and supporting our educational offerings. To Tom Wharton, whom we remember here today, whose vision and commitment to believing that perfusion was worthy of becoming a profession, and being a great teammate in the early years, we are eternally grateful. To the distinguished members of this Academy, continue to pursue innovation, strive for excellence and ensure that we are a welcoming organization. I am confident that our profession will continue to make tough choices and embrace

teamwork as a key to our success and the patients we serve. Ed Darling will be assuming the role as President of The Academy at the close of this meeting. I could not think of anyone in our profession who better epitomizes “teamwork in action” and I trust you will give him your full support. Thank you for your attention and again thank you for the honor of serving as your President this past year.

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