

The Festival of Light brings joy to the workplace: team building and improving communication.

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Abstract

Interpersonal conflict was a major concern in the development of Paediatric services at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, the only tertiary care facility in Guyana. Despite redefined roles, improved management structure and skills training of team members, interpersonal conflict persisted among team members.

A team building exercise during the Hindu Festival of Lights, Diwali, aimed at building trust and improving teamwork was implemented. A Rangoli competition ie design and creation of folk art led to significantly improved team work, collaboration, cooperation, communication respect among team members.

The activity was so well received that it has now expanded to include other departments and sponsorship by the hospital administration.

We will encourage hospital wider participation and share our experience with other similar health facilities in the country. We also intend to attract corporate sponsorship for equipment for the units of the winning teams.

Define

Guyana is a multiethnic, multi-religious society in the English speaking Caribbean. Paediatric services at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation in Guyana, the only tertiary care facility, are in the infancy of its development. The staff of the four paediatric units (medicine, surgery, neonatal intensive care and paediatric critical care) is comprised of medical practitioners with different levels of academia and skills from local, regional and international training programs. This ensures fertile ground for significant workplace conflict both within individual units as well as across units and even interdepartmentally. Unclear job roles, unclear management structure, poor communication, inadequate opportunities for training/promotion, poor remuneration, a paucity of adequate equipment and supplies required for optimal treatment of patients were among the many issues that needed to be addressed (1). The introduction of a head of paediatric services and an operations committee comprising of medical and nursing leadership from each unit, have made significant progress in addressing many of the issues that impact on team effectiveness (2). However, there was persistence of interpersonal intolerance that often resulted in overt conflict, especially among the junior members of staff.

Discover

Despite its multi-ethnic make-up, Guyanese practice religious tolerance with all citizens enthusiastically participating in each other's religious festivities. In 2019, a "Rangoli competition" was introduced as a team building exercise to build trust and inject some fun into an otherwise serious work environment. Rangoli is a form of folk art from India, thought to bring good luck. It involves the use of coloured rice/sand/stones/petals to create beautiful designs on the floor of courtyards during Hindu festivals. Diwali, "the festival of lights" connotes the triumph of good of over evil and was thought to be a perfect opportunity to promote civility, kindness and compassion towards members of the "work family". While caring for children and seeing them better is infinitely rewarding, there are also reasons to be feel discouraged when the outcome is suboptimal. A supportive environment, and finding joy for ourselves will likely positively impact on our ability to provide holistic care for the children in our charge.

The competition was fully embraced by the members of the Paediatric units, with the intensive care teams collaborating with medicine, against the surgical service! The competition was labour intensive and required much collaboration on design, materials, and labour. All levels of staff readily participated, there was mutual respect and much laughter and a good time was had by all. Team spirit and cohesiveness was evident throughout the competition. The competitiveness did not deter teams sharing resources when it was necessary, so everyone could finish their design. There was a definite shift in the way team members interacted post competition, morale improved and professional interactions were conducted with less animosity. The success of the exercise was a topic for discuss throughout the hospital in the following months.

In 2020, a second competition was run by Paediatrics, but this time, by popular demand, all departments who had cause to interact with Paediatric Services were allowed to participate. Nine (9) teams participated. Strict Covid 19 guidelines had to be followed but the competition attracted dozens of spectators from all departments. The hospital administration provided snacks and the Minister of Social Protection visited and was invited to be a judge. The Obstetric team won, followed closely by the Covid 19 and Paediatric Surgery teams. Camaraderie has been at an all time high among the various paediatric units and disagreements are more often handled in a professional manner without escalation as was the norm in the past.

Design

The Rangoli competition scheduled for October 2021 has been given budgetary allocation and has found a place in the team building exercises supported by the hospital. The interest and good will it generates is clear. The benefits of the activity are increased communication, planning skills, employee motivation and collaboration, and it fosters innovation and creativity. The staff see each other in a different light, allowing them to see each other's strengths and weaknesses and improving how well they work together. It provides them the opportunity to celebrate success, cheer for their co-workers and have some fun.

Dream

The Rangoli competition will likely continue to spread joy among the staff and we envision hospital wide participation for many years to come especially given the buy-in from the hospital administration. Prizes, in addition to bragging rights will encourage even greater participation. Our hope is that corporate sponsorship of needed equipment for the winning teams/units will be realised in the near future.

Destiny

Make this an annual event with participation of the wider hospital

Create interest for corporate sponsorship of prizes

Share our experience/findings with other hospitals via our Ministry of Health

References

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