

# An analysis of novel team working practices developed on psychiatric inpatient wards during the COVID-19 response.

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## Aim

To examine how a traditional team working paradigm on general psychiatric wards was adapted to suit new challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Background

As the COVID-19 pandemic developed, healthcare settings were required to adapt to meet evolving patient need. Following a period of redeployment to designated "COVID Wards", the authors considered how the new COVID approach to patient care, leadership and communication differed when compared to more traditional psychiatric team models. The authors considered how the pandemic had affected how we work as medics and our role in the wider MDT.

## Methods

We examined the new COVID approach to team working in the context of existing literature in the field of leadership, management and communication within healthcare settings. There was an analysis of the practical ways in which we set about working in our new environment and changes to team structure. As our interest in this area grew, we came to recognise that we had already adopted a number of recognised strategies in our new way of working.

Creating Space	Framing the Work	Adapting Routines
<p>We created a novel workspace in which we based ourselves This allowed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative working</li> <li>• Open &amp; immediate communication<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Deployment of resources where needed</li> </ul> <p>Later we allocated members to other wards to disseminate specialist knowledge</p>	<p>Our new working environment, allowed us convene regularly and "Frame Work"<sup>2</sup>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared understanding of the work</li> <li>• Each member understood the importance of the work</li> <li>• We would regularly "reframe"</li> </ul> <p>We nurtured a supportive environment where we could rapidly adapt our approach</p>	<p>We ensured we remained open to new ideas and adapted our routine to meet the evolving challenges.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regularly reviewing literature</li> <li>• Liaising with colleagues in other specialties</li> <li>• Developing guidance "on the fly"</li> </ul> <p>We reflected that we were able to make more rapid changes in our new roles, than in our traditional working roles.</p>

## Teaming

"Teamwork on the fly"<sup>3</sup>

We found the following three aspects particularly important

### Curiosity

A key aspect of a group who are able to successfully 'Team', is their inherent professional curiousness of other members of their team. Although we had been deployed as a cohort of medics, we were all at different stages in our career, with differing backgrounds and medical experience. As a team, we recognised this early, and used this to our advantage.

### Humility

We acknowledged that no one person had all the answers, therefore we shared the burden of leadership. Each shift after we had effectively 'framed the work' we assigned tasks. Although conventionally the Consultant Psychiatrist may have been considered the team leader, we understood that the value of our team during this time was our pooled expertise.

### "We don't know..."

We were prepared to accept that there were times when we were unsure about how to proceed. We relied on each other, and also reached out to other specialties around us for advice. The secure and collaborative environment we had created helped us foster the confidence to say "we don't know"

## Conclusion

The challenges presented by COVID-19 on psychiatric inpatient wards required novel team working approaches. As a group of relative strangers we found ourselves "teaming" together and our experiences demonstrate that we are able to adapt our working style, both as individuals, and as a collective. These team working approaches may be fruitful when we are eventually able to return to our "usual" ways of working.

## References

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3. TED (2018), *How to turn a group of strangers into a team* | Amy Edmondson. Viewed 29 September 2020. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3boKz0Exros>