

# COLLABORATION HEALTH CARE

BRINGING IDEAS, BUSINESSES, AND PEOPLE TOGETHER  
TO IMPROVE HEALTH CARE



Collaboration Health Care, Inc., 601 Carlson Parkway, Suite 1050; Minnetonka, Minnesota 55305  
[www.collaborationhealthcare.com](http://www.collaborationhealthcare.com); [info@collaborationhealthcare.com](mailto:info@collaborationhealthcare.com) 952-475-6322

## Collaborating In Health Care?

We had hoped to take a break from “health care reform.” But, it’s hard to get away from it when that is all we hear. The vote taken on Sunday in the House is another step toward reallocating the financial resources of the health care system. The process has been ugly, mean, and partisan all the way. It has not been easy to watch.

It is ironic, then, the topic scheduled for this month was about collaboration. Especially with what just occurred in Washington, all organizations, health care providers, consumers, employers, and, yes the government, are going to need to begin to work together in new ways. While “collaboration” as an idea is a buzz-word in many other industries, it is especially important in health care, as collaboration may be a necessary strategy for survival.

As you think about the opportunities for collaboration and read our thoughts, just visualize what you are observed in Congress, do the opposite and you can safely assume you are probably on the right track to successful collaboration.

## Collaboration Is An Art

In the book, *Collaboration, A Health Care Imperative*, Toni Sullivan discussed the absolute need for a more collaborative health care system to break down the walls, open the communication, and improve the care delivery for the individual consumer- the patient. This was written almost 15 years ago. While “working together” is starting to occur in some areas of health care, most others still have a long ways to go.

Developing collaborative business strategies has become common in other industries. Non profits have had to rely on collaborative strategies for years. Proctor and Gamble collaborates with customers and competitors to improve both products and business processes. Technology companies collaborate to provide “one-stop” solutions for customers. A 2006 study produced by Frost and Sullivan found using collaborative strategies (working together) was “twice as significant as a company’s aggressiveness in pursuing new market opportunities (strategic orientation) and five-times as significant as the external market environment (market turbulence).”

Health care is no doubt a turbulent market. New collaborative approaches are starting to develop as a matter of survival. While still relatively new in most areas in the business of health care, the nursing and health services management literature (and to a lesser extent the medical literature) on collaboration is extensive- particularly with collaboration between the doctor and the nurse.

*(Continued Next Column)*

## THIS NEWSLETTER

Collaborating In Health Care	1
Collaboration Is An Art	1-2
Something To Think About	2

The ability to strategically collaborate is a requirement to participate in the health care system that is evolving. Medical Homes, Health Homes, Accountable Care Organizations, Electronic Medical Records, and all the other new ideas will require collaboration between those providing care, those receiving care, and those processing the transactions in-between. While clinical collaboration may exist today, we will see an increasing number of business collaborations that will ultimately impact the delivery of health care in the future. Those health care organizations, provider groups, and delivery systems able to collaborate with others will be in a position to capitalize on the opportunities.

Toni Sullivan states in his book, “Collaboration, simply defined as working together for a common goal, is easy to extol and difficult to achieve.”

Moving from a “siloes-system” to a “collaborative system” will not be easy. Our health care system has evolved into a structure of individual sub-systems each with individual core beliefs, values, and transactional processes. Collaboration will require organizations to look beyond these individual core beliefs to other potential partners and allies to achieve a common goal better than they could achieve the results on their own.

*(Continued on Next Page)*

### Sources Used This Month:

Collaboration: A Health Care Imperative; Toni J. Sullivan; Ed, RN, FAAN; University of Missouri; McGraw-Hill; 1998

When Internal Collaboration Is Bad For The Company; Morten Hansen; University of California, Berkley; Harvard Business Review; April, 2009

Why Teams Don’t Work: J. Richard Hackmen; Harvard Business Review; May, 2009

We’d love to hear from you. Let us know your thoughts, your feedback, and other ideas.

E-mail us at: [info@collaborationhealthcare.com](mailto:info@collaborationhealthcare.com)

Follow Our Blog at: [www.collaborationhealthcare.blogspot.com](http://www.collaborationhealthcare.blogspot.com)

## Collaboration Is An Art (con't)

Successful collaboration is as much an art as a science. Numerous academic and operational collaborative models exist and we've simplified our concept into some very basic principles:

1. **Know Your Goal; Clarity is Key.** This principle is self-explanatory but easier said than done. Organizations will need to clearly identify what it is they want to accomplish to determine whether collaboration makes sense. Many times, this will require a re-commitment to your mission, values, and other foundational aspects attached to your organization. Collaboration is about working together not sacrificing what you stand for.
2. **Determine If Collaboration Makes Sense.** Sometimes exploring collaborative opportunities just don't make sense. Morton Hanson (U Cal Berkley) put forward ideas to assist in determining when collaboration approaches may or may not work by simply exploring the costs and benefits of a project using collaboration versus not. Organizations need to clearly identify both the potential gains and costs of working in a collaborative manner. If the benefits identified outweigh the costs, it makes sense to explore collaboration.
3. **Get the Right People Together.** Nothing kills a collaborative idea quicker than getting someone in the group who is not open to collaboration (even when they indicate they are open to it). Collaboration is about being open to new ideas and doing more things better than you could do on your own. Collaboration is about win/win results. And, successful collaborations consist of members that have both the competency and authority to follow-through.

Just because you have not collaborated with someone before don't assume they would not want to collaborate today. With the rapid changes taking place in health care, and our economy in general, collaborative opportunities are being created all the time.

4. **Set The Rules.** J. Richard Hackmen (Harvard professor and expert in teams and effectiveness) found things that happen the first time a group meets strongly affect how the group operates throughout its entire life. An unclear operating structure at the beginning (why am I here and what do you want me to do?) can lead to confusion and quick disintegration of a collaborative effort. Especially when exploring collaborative opportunities with participants with competing self-interests, it is important to establish the "process-rules" the group will follow.

Many formal process-rules already exist. Make certain the rules used are aligned with the outcomes you hope to achieve. To maximize innovation and creativity the process-rules should be flexible and encourage open communication and dialogue. More formal rules can be used for efforts with a more limited or specific focus. In any case the rules used should never force any participant to compromise any of their core values at any time through the process.

5. **Agree On The Mutual Goals and "Off-Limits" Items:** Collaboration is all about focusing on the items of agreement and making win/win compromises that make sense to help move the collaboration forward.

Successful collaborations will agree on the goals they hope to attain together early-on and refer to the established goals as the basis for all decisions going forward. Successful collaborations refer to the goals frequently, to make certain the activities that are occurring are aligned with the goals you hope to achieve.

Especially in health care, we all know there are certain items you will not be able to compromise no matter who you are with. It is best to identify these items at the beginning and acknowledge the "elephant in the room." This will allow the group to focus on mutual interests and avoid trying to force a compromise on a "non-negotiable item."

6. **Communicate Openly and Often:** George Bernard Shaw wrote, "The single biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it is taking place." Effective communication and ongoing interaction is critical to a successful collaborative effort.

It is easy to assume that simply sending a text-message or an e-mail meets the requirement of communicating. Communication involves not only the activity of sending information (by whatever method) but assuring the understanding of the information on the other end. True collaborative efforts establish both formal and informal channels of communication with all communication and interactions focused on the goals established between all members.

7. **Build Trust:** Successful collaborations are built on a certain level of trust between the participants. Unfortunately, we do not have a lot of trust in our health care system today. Hackmen found "a good team will satisfy its internal and external clients, become stronger as a unit as time passes, and foster the learning and growth of its individual members." Trust needs to be earned and will take time but is a requirement to implement a successful collaborative effort.

While these principles are not all-inclusive, they provide a framework to think about as you explore the growing number of collaborative opportunities in health care. The fundamental business models and incentives used in this industry are going to be dramatically changing. Those who explore collaborative approaches today may very likely be the ones capitalizing on the opportunities tomorrow.

### Something To Think About

*"In the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed."*

Charles Darwin

*"Good design begins with honesty, asks tough questions, comes from collaboration and trusting your intuition."*

Freeman Thomas

Continued Next Column