

## **What is Teamwork in Intensive Care? An ethnographic investigation of collaborative practice.**

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**Session 3B**

**12/3/2010**

Introduction: Against a backdrop of already high staff workloads current healthcare is facing increasing complexity and demand for services. Interdisciplinary teamwork is seen as key to addressing these challenges since it can facilitate organisations make efficient use of staff resources whilst maintaining safety and quality. Using intensive care units (ICU) as an example, this study explores challenges and drivers of efficient team practice in highly complex healthcare settings.

Method: This study of teamwork practices in two London ICUs follows an ethnographic approach, incorporating observational and interview data collection methods to elicit understanding of the social processes that enable teamwork. Data are collected in-situ via fieldnote entries, contemporaneous notes of actual ICU practice, and formal and informal discussions with healthcare professionals. Data analysis follows ethnographic principles of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification, including domain and spatial analysis approaches.

Findings: Intensive Care is reported as a complex environment with high levels of uncertainty and instability. Teamwork is argued as a way of finding order in an otherwise chaotic environment, influenced by disciplinary, structural and organisational factors. ICU professionals experience teams as dynamic and elastic entities where membership is negotiated through individual patient needs. Teamwork skills are identified as important in allowing coordinated or disjointed action while ownership and operation of space is revealed both as an important enabler or inhibitor to effective teamwork with territorial behaviour contributing to the power game between different professional groups.

Conclusion: Investigation of actual team practice in natural settings extends current understanding of the functioning and social construction of healthcare teams as well as appreciates the impact of disciplinary and organisational factors on team performance. In the seemingly chaotic world of ICUs, order may be achieved by identifying, understanding and addressing the barriers and facilitators to collaborative practice.