Case Vignette

Trust on the Interprofessional Team

November 13, 2019

Alexi is a medical student engaged in a 6-week clerkship in pediatrics.  She is working on-call with an intern and a senior resident.  They recently admitted Marcus, a 2-year-old boy with abdominal pain.  In the Emergency Department, clinicians were concerned about appendicitis but the imaging was inconclusive, so the patient was admitted for serial abdominal exams and appendicitis.

While the rest of the physicians are tied up elsewhere, Alexi goes to see Marcus who is due for his next abdominal exam.  At the bedside she meets Nancy, a nurse caring for Marcus with whom Alexi has not previously worked.  After Nancy and Alexi meet one another, Alexi approaches Marcus’ bedside where he is asleep.  Nancy says, “Actually, I don’t think examining the patient is a good idea right now. Marcus had a very tough afternoon with lots of anxiety and an IV that fell out.  I spoke with the social worker and we suggested that his parents take a walk to calm down; they had been so upset about everything Marcus is going through.  We promised Marcus would rest while they are gone.”

Alexi explains that it has been two hours and the exam is important to ensure Marcus does not have evolving appendicitis. Nancy states she recently examined Marcus herself and felt reassured, but Alexi insists her senior resident wants the exam done now.

Questions for discussion:

1.    What might Alexi and Nancy be thinking about the situation and about each other at this point?

2.    What barriers are in place that could contribute to this conflict and inhibit trust between Alexi and Nancy?

3.    If you were supervising Nancy or Alexi, what facilitators of trust would you recommend be leveraged to resolve the conflict?

4.    As a supervisor/educator, what are some teaching points that would help guide your learners for future interprofessional collaboration?

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