



Health Workforce Initiative

Hi-Touch Healthcare: The Critical Six Soft Skills

Grab-N-Go Independent Training Module:

Professional Networking

HEALTH WORKFORCE INITIATIVE STATEWIDE ADVISORY COMMITTEE, CALIFORNIA
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Professional Networking

Background Information

The concept of networking is becoming increasingly complicated. Networking within an information technology context refers to the exchanging information or providing access to a central store of information.ⁱ Networking also describes relationships within a professional practice in terms of “building up or maintaining informal relationships, especially with people whose friendship could bring advantages such as job or business opportunities.”ⁱⁱ Due to technology, networking now describes social interactions among friends and acquaintances. In healthcare settings, professional networking from all three perspectives provides valuable opportunities for all members of the healthcare team.ⁱⁱⁱ

Stanton & Lemer (2010) define a network as “a set of nodes where connections are made either through individuals or organizational units and the linkages between them.”^{iv} The authors describe the conditions that allow groups or clusters to form around a common goal. Basically, this means that the collective power harness by a group of individuals with a shared goal can potentially be exponentially greater than the influence of a single person. Health care professions can maximize this potential by forming online networks designed to improve the overall effectiveness and safety in healthcare by opening and strengthening lines of communication.^v



Because effective collaboration is central to healthcare performance and patient care delivery, social networking in healthcare has its place. Granted, as a healthcare worker, use of social media must align with HIPAA regulations. As such, where does an individual go to connect with others to discuss specific conditions, disease states, or specialties? Thankfully, the internet has a vast number of professional networking sites where one can ask and receive questions provided that the specifics of the professional setting or not mentioned. For example, Doctor’sHangout.com is an international social networking service for physicians, residents, and other health care professionals. This network helps to establish and maintain personal and professional relationships. Nurseconnect.com is an online social network for nurses and other healthcare professionals who would like to share their experiences and knowledge with others.

Psychcentral.com is a mental health social network that offers information on mental health and provides guides to websites, newsgroups, and online mailing lists in the fields of mental health, psychology, psychiatry, and social work. Sermo.com is the largest online physicians networking site in the United States. It has thousands of physician members and is used to collaborate on difficult cases and to exchange knowledge. Members have described it as a “virtual water cooler.”^{vi}

Having sound professional networking skills and resources is also vital for success in the healthcare industry. A well-developed professional network can be a source for mentors and offers a range of information from pediatrician referrals to references for career advancement. In this current employment culture within the



healthcare industries, job security can come and go, but a solid network of contacts is valuable no matter what the context.vii Stephens (2013) defines networking as “the ability to develop and use business contacts for purposes beyond the reason for the initial contact.”viii It is important to remember, however, that the most effective networking occurs when you are just being yourself: relaxing and talking with people inside or outside your area of expertise. While expanding your professional network clearly increases your chances of career advancement in the future, it takes years to build a network of friends and acquaintances in the business; and, one must maintain those contacts for years to have the potential for career advancement in the future.

Social and professional networking is playing increasingly important roles in the healthcare industry. This module will focus on the resources available for online social and professional networking, as well as techniques to increase networking in your professional life.



Training



Goal: Participants will learn techniques to increase networking in their professional life, as well as discover available resources for networking.

WIIFM: What's in it for me? Professional networking can be utilized by all members of the healthcare team to exchange information and to build and maintain professional relationships. The importance of understanding resources that are available to individuals is invaluable for any individual in the healthcare setting.



Materials Provided:

- Professional Networking Module PowerPoint
- Activity #1: Jigsaw Puzzler
- Activity #2: Speed “Dating”



Directions for the Trainer: Activity preparation information is included in this document and/or within the PowerPoint presentation notes. Each PowerPoint slide, as appropriate, includes detailed explanations and Procedures for the trainer. As with all Grab-N-Go Modules, you can use it all for a more detailed training, or simply use one or two of the many activities—a la carte style!



ACTIVITY #1

Jigsaw Puzzler



Goal: To complete the puzzle as a group, a process that encourages teamwork and networking.



Materials Needed:

- A small jigsaw puzzle (35-50 pieces)
(Trainer: equally divide the puzzle pieces by the number of participants.)
- PowerPoint Slide #6



Procedures:

1. Split the puzzle pieces among the participants. Distribute one pile of pieces to each participant.
2. When you begin the activity, instruct the participants that the purpose of the activity is to practice teamwork and networking skills.
3. Have participants gather around an empty table and have them begin putting the puzzle together. Tell them that they have a maximum of 10 minutes to put the puzzle together.
4. If not completed call time at the end of the ten minutes.
(Trainer: observe the group dynamic during the activity, paying attention to who takes charge and how that leadership role was established, who stands back and does not participate, overall impressions of the level types of cooperation and/or conflict, and group communication patterns.)
5. Reflection: have participants reflect on the group dynamics during the activity:
 - a. Did anyone in particular take charge?
 - b. Did anyone stand back and not really speak or participate?
 - c. How did they work together as a team?
 - d. Did they speak to each other or just work individually?

(Trainer: use your observations to guide or push reflections as needed.)



Activity #2

Speed “Dating”



Goal: To practice professional networking skills during an interview by paying close attention to the power of beginning the interaction with the handshake and smile.



Materials Needed:

- Watch or other device to track time.
 - (Trainer Preparation: Label one flip-chart (or side of board) “Excluded” and the other “Included.” Draw a vertical line down the middle of each flip-chart. The left hand side of each should be labeled “feelings” and the right hand side labeled “behaviors.”)



- PowerPoint Slide #13

Procedures:

1. Have participants quickly think about what their “dream job” would be.
2. Have participants form two lines, with pairs facing each other. (If there is an odd number of participants, the trainer may need to participate in activity.)
3. One line will be the interviewer line and the other will be a line of people being interviewed.
4. Provide these instructions to participants:
 - You have one minute to introduce yourself to the person who is about to interview you for your dream job.
 - The interviewee will do most of the talking, but the interviewer can speak as well.
5. Set the timer for one minute. Instruct participants that before they begin, the interviewee should identify “Dream Job” so the interviewer can ask appropriate questions.
6. Start the timer and say “Begin” and let the interview proceed.
7. When time is up, the people in the interviewee line will move one spot to the left. The person at the end of the line will circle around to the other end of the interviewee line.
8. When all interviewees have introduced themselves to all of the interviewers, the roles are switched so that each participant gets a chance to play each role.
9. At the end of the activity, have the participants offer suggestions and/or comments about what things were positive and what things could be done in a more effective manner. Some topics for discussion:
 - Did the interviewee offer a handshake? Was it firm, but not too firm?
 - Did the interviewee smile when s/he introduced themselves?
 - What, specifically, made a good impact or created a positive impression?



References

ⁱ Encarta English Dictionary, North America (2105). Retrieved on 9-25-16. <http://encarta.world-english-dictionary.software.informer.com/>

ⁱⁱ Encarta English Dictionary, North America (2105). Retrieved on 9-25-16. <http://encarta.world-english-dictionary.software.informer.com/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Stanton, E., & Lemer, C. (2010). Networking for healthcare reform. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 103(9): 345-346. doi: [10.1258/jrsm.2010.100160](https://doi.org/10.1258/jrsm.2010.100160)

^{iv} Stanton, E., & Lemer, C. (2010). Networking for healthcare reform. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 103(9): 345-346. doi: [10.1258/jrsm.2010.100160](https://doi.org/10.1258/jrsm.2010.100160)

^v Stanton, E., & Lemer, C. (2010). Networking for healthcare reform. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 103(9): 345-346. doi: [10.1258/jrsm.2010.100160](https://doi.org/10.1258/jrsm.2010.100160)

^{vi} Medicine on the Net. (2010). Focus: Social networking resources. *Health Leaders*.

^{vii} Besson, T. (2015). 10 habits to help advance your career. Retrieved from <http://www.careercast.com/career-news/10habits-help-advance-your-career>

^{viii} Stephens, S. (2013). Shake hands with your future. Networking key to career advancement. *Biomedical Instrumentation & Technology*, May/June, 2013.