



Interdisciplinary collaboration in geriatrics: Advancing health for older adults

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ABSTRACT

The call for interdisciplinary research, education, and practice is heightened by the recognition of the potential it holds in generating creative solutions to complex problems in health care and to improving quality and effectiveness of care. With the aging of the population and the complex issues in caring for older adults, interdisciplinary collaboration is particularly salient to the field of geriatrics. However, despite interest in this approach for several decades, adoption has been slow and dissemination is not widespread. This article provides examples of recent initiatives and presents driving and restraining forces involved in adoption of interdisciplinary approaches.

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Interdisciplinary teams have gained substantial attention over the past decade as a mechanism to promote and enhance healthcare delivery practices and clinical outcomes. Several recent reports assert the importance of highly functioning interdisciplinary teams to ensure delivery of optimal healthcare services, including the Institute of Medicine reports on quality in long-term care, aging America, and the future of nursing; the Josiah H. Macy Foundation report

on interprofessional education; and the New England Health Care Institute report on primary care.^{1–5} In education, interdisciplinary teamwork is recognized as a core competency across healthcare professions, along with person/community-centered care, evidence-based practice, information technology, and quality improvement.^{6–8} In the scientific arena, the National Institute of Health Roadmap emphasizes interdisciplinary research as essential to solving

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Table 1 – Select Geriatric Interdisciplinary Initiatives

Program Title/Scope/Funding	Goal
Building Interdisciplinary Geriatric Health Care Research Centers (RAND Corporation)⁴⁴ Phase I (2002-2005)—5 centers \$1.5 million Phase II (2006-)—7 centers \$2.5 million	Create infrastructure and incentives for encouraging and facilitating interdisciplinary research at participating institutions for new and established researchers through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing innovative clinical and health services interventions • Education, training, and mentoring for junior investigators • Identifying resources and building collaborations to encourage research focused on aging • Providing a platform for attracting external funding, including funding for pilot projects, workshops, and expert review of proposals
Geriatric Interdisciplinary Teams in Practice (2000 -) 5 sites \$7.3 million http://www.jhartfound.org/program/tip.htm http://caremanagementplus.org/ http://www.peacehealth.org/oregon/seniorhealth/clinicoutcomestudy/default.htm	Test innovative models of team care in select health systems around the country. Four of the five projects focus on team efforts to improve the primary care of older persons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PeaceHealth Oregon Region • Group Health Cooperative of Puget Sound • Rush University Medical Center • Intermountain Healthcare • Care Management Plus (includes care managers and information systems)
Geriatric Interdisciplinary Team Training (1995-2005) 8 demonstration sites plus national coordinating center \$13.3 million http://www.gittprogram.org/	Enhance the interdisciplinary training of health professionals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create national training models involving partnerships between “real world” providers of geriatric care and the educational institutions that train health professionals. • Improve academic responsiveness to the health care delivery system. • Develop well-tested curricula for geriatric interdisciplinary team training. • Create a cadre of well-trained professionals competent in gerontology and interdisciplinary team skills.
Programs for All-Inclusive Care of the Elderly (CMS) Pilot founded in 1971 72 programs in 30 states in 2009	Provide case management to frail dually-eligible (Medicare/Medicaid) older adults using an interdisciplinary team model
NYU3T: Teaching, Technology, and Teamwork (Macy Foundation) (2009-)³⁸ \$792,499 http://dei.med.nyu.edu/research/nyu3t	Based on GITT, this project aims to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a physical and virtual environment that fosters physicians and nurses working together. • Develop a well-tested curriculum for interdisciplinary team training of health professionals. • Validate new methods and technologies to teach health professionals. • Enhance students’ cultural competencies and skills for managing health disparities. • Create a large cadre of well-trained professionals competent in interdisciplinary team skills.

complex problems.⁹ The National Academies of Science defined interdisciplinary research as “a mode of research by teams or individuals that integrates information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, and/or theories from 2 or more disciplines or bodies of specialized knowledge to advance fundamental understanding or to solve problems whose

solutions are beyond the scope of a single discipline or area of research practice.”¹⁰ This definition is expanded in this article to include education and practice.

In the report, *Retooling for an Aging America*, the Institute of Medicine provided a strategic roadmap for

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