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Title: Working with Health Professionals: A Collaborative Approach

Hosts: Mahek Bansal & Larissa Ferrari

Mahek Bansal

Hi, everyone. Welcome back to the New PossibilOTs podcast. We are so excited to have you back with us for another episode. Today, Larissa and I thought it would be good to follow on from our last two episodes and talk today about working collaboratively with health professionals. So, as OTs, we regularly work with other allied health professionals as part of a client's team, and we thought it would be nice to talk a bit more specifically about how this collaboration might look different when we're working with health professionals in comparison to educators that we spoke about last week. So we want to stay specific. We've spoken a little bit more about the general purpose of collaboration. Why is it so important when we're working within a client's team in the last episode, so please feel free to listen to that first if you would like. But today, Larissa, I guess maybe we should get started by talking about what are the purposes and what are the reasons why we might be trying to facilitate these collaborative relationships with health professionals.

Larissa Ferrari

I think we've already said a lot of things prior to that conversation, as you said, including our scope of practice, goal setting and things like that help us to understand a little bit of what we do, which is good to know what we know, so then we can collaborate with other professionals. And then for me, the main purpose would be, again, we spoke about the child being a whole, like, we work with so many things at the same time. So when we have that collaboration with other health professionals, we understand exactly what goals we are all working on and how they can complement, but not be simply the same.

So how my goals in comparison to a Speechie (speech pathologist) can be complementary, how we can be working towards the same thing, but in our own scope of practice, or if they're different because they have different goals, how so we could understand what we are doing, so we could even support ourselves. Like during my sessions, I do have to work with communication, with social communication. So by understanding what the Speechie (speech pathologist) is working on and the strategies, I could somehow implement some of these strategies in my sessions. Well, I guess I've spoken about two main purposes, so maybe, Mahek, you can either expand more on that or bring some more strategies or purposes of that collaboration.

Mahek Bansal

Yes, definitely. And I think, on your last point, I guess expanding on that, I think it's really important. Working consistently also means that we are using strategies that don't contradict each other's strategies or suggestions, not only for being within our scope, but also to support the client. It will be confusing for the client. It might be overwhelming for the client if they've got ten different strategies they've been told to try at the same time, and some of them contradict each other. So I guess to support the client, to achieve success, we want to be working alongside these health professionals in the team, and then also to support the client as well, is incorporating strategies, as you said, of others, into our own work and vice versa.

I think the other thing is also understanding the other health professionals perspective on what the functional performance is or the concern, the goal that you're trying to address. I guess where we're all trained differently and trained to see different things, it's really important that we're collaborating to understand what other factors might be contributing that, what we might not be able to see, because that's just not where our training is, and that's the benefit of having someone else on the team. So I guess we can use each other to learn from each other in benefit of the client.

Larissa Ferrari

And I'll be repetitive again, just expanding on what you're saying now, but I think we also don't have one magic recipe for the client. Evidence is telling us that there are many different ways you can work

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in one specific goal. So again, when we have that curiosity to understand where the other professional is coming from, what's their training, what's the evidence they're using, so then we can understand more. So let's say I'm more like from a developmental approach. I follow more of a developmental approach, but then I'm working with a professional that has a different approach, more task oriented, or more training one specific task. So it's not to invalidate what the other professional knows or feel that they're invalidating what we know, but just understanding that we both could have a different approach or a different perception of approaches or different preferences.

Larissa Ferrari

And we can still work in collaboration, understanding what we're doing, because it's the same child at the end, we're working with the same bigger picture. It's just that minor things that we have to be attentive to.

Mahek Bansal

Yeah, and I guess when I think, I know in our last episode, we talked about some barriers to facilitating this collaborative relationship. And when I think about barriers in terms of these relationships with health professionals, I think there are a lot of similarities. Things like time, things like resources, knowledge - in terms of being able to understand the other person's perspective and our open mindedness, to want to have that curiosity and come in from a sense of wanting to learn and know more. Is there anything else you can think of Larissa?

Larissa Ferrari

I would say the biggest thing for me is still time. I feel like I don't know if it was out of privilege or if my way of communication was a little bit, in a sense, that facilitate that interaction, but I usually have great relationships with other health professionals. I usually have great experiences when I try to reach out for them and collaborate. But just that time that we can have that continued conversation and talk about the strategies that we've been using. So sometimes we have to be really straightforward, or sometimes I even have to have some timers or to do lists to remind me to check on them and check their strategies. Or even sometimes if I see a new device or augmentative communication, oh, I have to contact a speech pathologist.

So I think that constant reminders that our schedule is busy, but that conversation, that collaboration is really important. I think that would be the biggest one for me. Could you think about a new one or one specific that you face in your routine Mahek?

Mahek Bansal

Not particularly, and I agree. I think I as well have some really beautiful relationships with health professionals. And a great thing about it is working in an area where we work, there are lots of similar connections. Like one, there's only maybe a few physiotherapists, and so a lot of the physios that I work with, we have quite a few common clients that we work together with. I think the time aspect for me is also more just scheduling time. For example, my time and my schedule when I have time to speak and liaise with other health professionals is because we're all very client based, appointment based, we don't have a lot of flexibility, to move around appointments and things to find common time. So I think that's where my time barrier comes in. I guess then thinking forward, and I think you've already mentioned, started to mention a couple of tips for everyone, so maybe we can just continue on with that. What are some tips that we could share with everyone of how to foster these relationships?

Larissa Ferrari

I think from the previous episode I would stay the same, but just work hard on that rapport building, just to have that humbleness, to approach the other professional in a sense that you want to know what they're doing, to collaborate, and not so much as if I'm doing this and that's working and that's great, you could do it, too. So you know, so sometimes we're so excited that things are working that

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we might sound a little bit like we're pushing them away or not validating their strategies and knowledge as well. So my first one would be just to work on that relationship first - that you want to collaborate, you have that point of view, and you want to expand on that. And that would be my tip number one, the first thing I would do as a therapist, at least.

Mahek Bansal

I guess for me, my second tip would be to think about the purpose of your specific communication with the health professional and what type of communication would best match that. So what I mean is think about why are you reaching out? Obviously, we want to foster these collaborative relationships, but in this specific circumstance, as you said, Larissa, is it because the child has a new device, AAC device, that they're using, and so you want to reach out to speech pathologists to learn and implement it in your sessions or if you're changing your goals or if there's a new health professional on the team. So think about what the purpose is and then think about what type of communication would best match that. Is it best suited for an email? Is it best suited for a phone call just between you and the health professional? Is it suited for an online meeting with the entire team or with the parent as well? I think that way we can get the most out of the communication and meet the purpose of why we're doing it in the first place.

Larissa Ferrari

And expanding on that, I think it's obvious, but it's good to remind people that are listening that I will always involve the parents and ask if they want to be part of it. Unless there's something very specific that I don't think they might be ready to listen or they might not benefit as much. But I will still get the consent to contact the therapist or the allied health professional or support worker just so they know what's happening and what the communication is looking like. I think that's obvious, but also very important for us to reinforce.

Mahek Bansal

Yes. And adding to that written consent, I think, is always the best.

Larissa Ferrari

Yes, agreed. My next tip would be, as I said before, to have that open mind. I remember when I graduated, we have that great sense of, I can do this, it's a new environment, but I've been learning so much. I want to put that into practice. And I remember I felt like I could do that. But in terms of my experience in relation to other health professionals, I was very limited. Therefore I didn't understand as much the evidence behind what they do. So sometimes I would assume that one thing, like, I think communication and behaviour are great examples from my experience, but I wouldn't understand the role of alternative and augmentative communication or some behavioural strategies, but just because they were not part of my learning.

So then when I opened that space, that open communication with other health professionals and good health professionals that knew what they're doing, it helped me so much to learn from them and then to advocate as well for the client's needs. So when we open that window of learning and collaboration can add on that as well to teach us, I think then we can improve what we do with the kids, we can offer a better service for the clients we work with.

Mahek Bansal

I guess my next tip would be to just look for opportunities for networking. I think that if you can connect and build relationships with other health professionals, maybe not even in specific relation to a client, but just generally, then that will already start to build a positive relationship. So then when you do have a client together, you're already comfortable, you know each other and you can feel like you're both coming into it in an equal ground. So things like in your local area, workshops or information courses and things like that I think are really great just to network and build your

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connections. And it can really make a big difference in the types of relationships you have with other health professionals.

Larissa Ferrari

That's another good tip. Mahek and I'll expand on that as well because as people might be aware, I moved to Australia, I was already an OT and I've already practiced another country before. So just coming into a new community and practicing, I really felt like I needed to understand what were the services around me, what they could provide for the client, what their specifics about their services, like what type of clients they see, because this does make a difference when we're supporting a child as a whole. Like we want to know what Speechies are, for example, if they work with communication, if the Speechie work with feeding, or what's the physiotherapist around me, or who's all the other professionals around me and who could better help that child in their need. I felt like I really needed to push myself to learn more about that. Any other tip you would say.

Mahek Bansal

One other thing I found really helpful with working with other health professionals is also just exploring all the options in terms of the types of collaboration you have. I think meetings are great when you want to share opinions, share goals, share ideas. Sometimes if it's more strategy based, how are the different professionals using strategies or implementing strategies, it's really great to try and organise like a joint session and have both of you with the client at the same time so that you can see each other's, the way that each other is implementing different strategies and things. So I guess collaboration doesn't just need to be a phone call. It doesn't just need to be a meeting. Think about, be creative and how we can best utilize our strengths and the different types of collaboration to support this child.

Larissa Ferrari

Totally agree with that one. That's a great one. And it's great to build that connection as well. Once we see the person face to face in action, beautiful strategies can come out of that relationship. Well, I think I'm running out of tips. I don't know about you, Mahek.

Mahek Bansal

Yeah. And I think it would be awesome if anyone else had any tips that they could share with us and share with our community that's building, because I think, as we've discussed, it's really important. But when there are barriers and challenges, I think it's up to us to reflect and make sure that we're bringing the most we can to this relationship in order to best support the child. So if anyone has any tips and strategies they'd like to share, please feel free to connect with us. Larissa and I would love to hear them. And other than that, we look forward to connecting with you again on our next episode. Bye.