Abstract – Introduction. The idea of the student therapeutic team emerged at the Medical University of Warsaw over thirty years ago. Under the watchful eye of the teaching staff, students of particular medical programs form an interdisciplinary therapeutic team and take care of patients at hospital in Działdowo.

Materials and methods. The study used two questionnaires consisting together of 57 closed questions. The first part included 73 persons and checked students’ and tutors’ understanding of the definition of a therapeutic team. The second part investigated what changes were observed in the perception of the concept of a therapeutic team and pertained to organizational issues concerning the camp, additional classes, conferences and student cooperation. The second part was completed by 68 persons. The data was processed using SPSS Statistics 17 statistical software package.

Results. The substantial majority of respondents said that a therapeutic team can operate in hospitals (94%). They believe costs of running the ward can be reduced (41%). Most respondents had not had any previous experiences with the therapeutic team through their studies (85%), and advocated its incorporation into the programmes of their studies (90%).

Conclusions. It is the right idea to set up therapeutic teams in healthcare institutions. Almost all respondents stated they would like to create such a team in their workplace.

Key words - Team care, therapeutic team, team care of the patient.

Streszczenie – Wstęp. Idea studenckiego zespołu terapeutycznego pojawiła się w Warszawskim Uniwersytecie Medycznym już ponad 30 lat temu. Studenci poszczególnych kierunków medycznych pod okiem doświadczonej kadry nauczycielskiej opiekują się pacjentami w szpitalu w Działdowie tworząc studencki zespół interdyscyplinarzy.


Wyniki. Zdecydowana większość respondentów stwierdziła, że zespół terapeutyczny może funkcjonować w szpitalu (94%). W ich ocenie możliwe jest obniżenie kosztów funkcjonowania oddziału (41%). Większość ankietowanych nie miała styczności z zespołem terapeutycznym w trakcie studiów (85%), oraz uznała zasadność wprowadzenia zespołów terapeutycznych w toku studiów (90%).

Wnioski. Idea tworzenia zespołu terapeutycznego w placówkach opieki zdrowotnej jest słuszna. Prawie wszyscy respondents zalecą stworzenia zespołu terapeutycznego w swoim miejscu pracy.

Słowa kluczowe – Opieka zespołowa, Zespół terapeutyczny, Zespółowa opieka nad pacjentem.

Author Affiliations:

Social Nursing Division, Faculty of Health Sciences, Medical University of Warsaw

Authors’ contributions to the article:

A. The idea and the planning of the study
B. Gathering and listing data
C. The data analysis and interpretation
D. Writing the article
E. Critical review of the article
F. Final approval of the article

Correspondence to:
Aleksander Jan Wiśniewski, Jana Brożka 18/26 Str., PL-01-451 Warsaw, mail: lordanonimus@wp.pl

Accepted for publication: December 11, 2014.
I. INTRODUCTION

The World Health Report 2010 stresses the need to set up and strengthen the role of a therapeutic team in the hospital ward functioning as a recommended form of care of patients. It is becoming necessary due to the fact that more and more innovative technologies are implemented in the world of medicine and problems related to public healthcare financing are growing [1].

A therapeutic team is a group of people who work in one profession, but have different degrees. The team consists of doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, dieticians, psychologists and clerics [2,3]. Team members can perform different roles and functions depending on their individual character traits, including the role of an innovator, coordinator, leader, motivator, mediator, guardian [4,5].

Study programmes in Poland do not provide for any separate course on the rules for setting up and running therapeutic teams. These rules are taught as part of such major fields of studies as Pedagogy, Sociology, Basics in Nursing, Public Health and Psychology. Demand for multidimensional education of medical professionals emerged in the 1980’s in England and Scandinavian countries.

The student research camp has been organised in Działdowo for over 30 years. Students monitor the internal medicine ward together with Cardiology and Rheumatology divisions, the hospital emergency ward and outpatient healthcare centres in hospital. The function of the camp patron is performed by dr hab. n. med. Jacek Imiela who teaches students of medicine, nursing, dietetics, physiotherapy, psychology and seminarians how to cooperate in the therapeutic team. Before the work began, rules for the student operations at the camp were set forth. Thus, students of medicine accompany the doctor on duty in the ward and admission room, where they establish an initial diagnosis of admitted patients. Following an interview, medical check-up and examinations ordered at the admission room, students continue making diagnosis and treating patients.

The overriding aim of this article is to evaluate the relevance of setting up and running therapeutic teams in health care institutions on the basis of the opinions of students taking part in the research team in Działdowo.

To this end, students’ theoretical and practical knowledge about the therapeutic team was analysed along with their views on its formation in hospital, impact on the patient treatment, size of economic effects and its influence on interpersonal communication.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the student therapeutic team, persons were divided into 2–3 member groups, including one fourth-, fifth- or sixth-year student of medicine, who had already attended the camp, and younger students (1st–3rd year of studies). Students of other programmes cooperated with each team which took care of 2–3 patients.

The camp also included 8 nursing students, all of whom were allocated to 3–5 medical teams taking care of 6–15 patients. Teams also included two students of physiotherapy, psychology, laboratory diagnostics, dietetics and seminarians. Every student had 30–40 patients under his or her care.

The study used two questionnaire forms: the first one consisted of 23 closed questions, the second one – of 34, including multiple answer questions, too.

During the camp, studies examining cooperation between team members were performed twice. In the first phase, the questionnaire was filled in by 73 persons, out of whom 55 persons were students of medicine, 8 persons studied nursing and each 2 persons were students of the remaining fields of study (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Student therapeutic team composition](image)

The first part of the questionnaire was designed to find out how much students and their tutors know about a therapeutic team, i.e. whom it is made of, why it is needed and what contribution it makes to patients’ lives and the hospital. The questionnaire also aimed to determine whether any participant had had any previous experience with an interdisciplinary team throughout their studies or work.
The second part of the questionnaire was filled in by 68 persons. The number changed because this time the study did not include students’ tutors and some individuals that had to leave the camp due to some personal reasons. The second part aimed to define the change in the way participants perceived the camp idea after three-week practice. An additional group of questions referred to camp organisational issues, additional classes, conferences or cultural events and the teaching staff’s attitude towards students.

**Statistical methods**

The frequency of the choice of specific questions was described by statistical methods. Results were presented in integers and the percentage value of the total was calculated. The analysis was performed in SPSS Statistics v17 software package.

**III. RESULTS**

Students could choose between four definitions of a therapeutic team. The most frequent answer (selected by 69 persons) defined the team as a group of people professionally related to each other who cooperate in many areas with a precise objective in mind; the team is composed of persons of different professions within a given focus group, e.g. instructor, engineer, or designer. Four persons stated that a therapeutic team is an association of people who want to expand their knowledge in many different areas (Figure 2).

73 respondents determined the team composition by claiming it is composed of a doctor, nurse, and dietician. The substantial majority was of the opinion that a psychologist (71 persons) and a psychotherapist (73 persons) should be its members, too. Other professional groups which, according to camp participants, should join the team are paramedics (33 persons), ward nurses (27 persons), pharmacists (23 persons). The students also stressed that the therapeutic team consists of the hospital management team (10 persons), chef (9 persons), administration officer (7 persons), architect, security staff member (3 persons), taxi driver (2 persons) and a maintenance worker (1 person) (Figure 3).

63 respondents claimed that the therapeutic team undertakes action to execute defined objectives, whereas 40 persons stated that it teaches cooperation. 38 persons stressed the possibility for exchanging experiences and 30 persons hold a view that the teamwork increases work efficiency. 15 students defined the team objective as striving to build „something” new while 14 considered it a chance for the rise of the capital (Figure 4).
The analysed group of 69 students stated that a therapeutic team can function in hospital, 2 persons had no opinions, and one person claimed that it cannot (Figure 5).

41 respondents evaluated how their attitude towards and knowledge of the therapeutic team changed. 27 of them stated their previous expectations and assumptions remained unchanged.

60 persons held the view that the functioning of the therapeutic team is beneficial to patients, 24 stated that it brings benefits to hospital personnel, 11 claimed it boosted the budget, and only 5 discerned advantages for hospital administration (Figure 6).

67 persons from the studied group were of the opinion that active involvement in the student research camp in Działdowo will help establish contacts with future colleagues. Only one person claimed that presence at the camp will not have any influence in this respect.

Likewise, to 67 respondents presence at the Działdowo camp kindled their interest in working professionally in the therapeutic team in the future, while 64 respondents stated they are going to aim to create such team as part of their professional occupation in the future (Figure 7).

**IV. DISCUSSION**

To the authors’ best knowledge, the therapeutic team functioning as part of the Działdowo student research camp is a nationally and globally unique initiative. The reviewed medical literature available in databases (PubMed, Medline, Ebsco) did not describe any similar form of completing summer internship programmes by students of medical schools.

Partnership and cooperation is crucial for building professional attitude. According to Scott et al., the partnership approach favours team cooperation [6]. Describing the camp in Działdowo, students emphasised that cooperation is one of the determinants of their work (according to 57 out of 68 respondents). S. Cofta also holds a view that cooperation should be one of the key features of an effectively functioning therapeutic team [7].

Being a therapeutic team member, taking care of patients requires coordinated actions. The actions planned in advance bring better effects, both in short and long term care over the patient [8]. However, to ensure long-term effects of such actions, students have to cooperate, sharing a common goal in a given period of time. During the camp, students were treating patients, providing medical advice, and were taking preventive and educational
actions among their patients in hospital and outpatient clinic.

For the coordinated therapeutic actions to be successful, there is a need for good cooperation in the team. Miles and Leinster stress the importance of communication and proper cooperation in the team [9].

Studies performed by Gotlib et al. at the Warsaw Medical University indicate that team cooperation is very important for effective treatment. They also pointed out the need to complement programs of study with courses during which students will get acquainted with the issues concerning the therapeutic team [10]. As an introduction to the therapeutic team related topic, many educational institutions organise an information lecture or a seminar, taking usually 60-90 minutes, during which students have a chance to learn about the areas in which they have to cooperate [11]. The start-up of the Działdowo camp was similar – the day before their first day of work in hospital, students went to the first seminar where they got to know one another and found out how people from different fields of study were divided into teams. Following the organisational part of the lecture, students were explained what a therapeutic team is, how it should operate to comply with standards, what instances of such teams can be found in the world literature. Thanks to this experience, students got to know each other on a personal level before they began working together, which was a good starting point for taking patients under their care.

Morrison et al. claim that it is important to introduce facultative classes which would elaborate on some issues and determine the areas of cooperation between particular team members [12]. According to Larson et al., it is of vital significance to establish educational curriculum and provide trainings to teaching staff in therapeutic team related issues to spread knowledge among students [13]. Price et al. also stress the need for a student-dedicated more comprehensive training programme in therapeutic team activity. All authors also mention seminars, workshops and facultative classes [14]. Respondents, in turn, point out that there is a strong need to introduce a framework program of practical studies modelled on the student research camp in Działdowo. The idea was advocated by 66 out of 77 students.

Permelee et al. also describe students’ voice on the incorporation of courses dealing with the functioning, role and a degree of cooperation between therapeutic team members into the program of their studies [15]. Brown et al. maintain that partnership-based model of cooperation in the therapeutic team and related trainings brings measureable effects on the environment of health care and academic institutions. The authors believe that thanks to that approach it is easier to influence social politics in terms of a multidimensional model of the patient treatment [16].

At the research camp in Działdowo, students found out that cooperation between team members can boost efficiency of their work, thanks to which patient treatment brings better effects. It shortens the period of hospitalisation, increasing the patient’s satisfaction with medical services. Ateah et al. have observed that higher satisfaction in the therapeutic team translates into a more effective treatment process and the patient feels satisfied with the care he or she was offered [17].

Anderson et al. describe the importance of patient-oriented care. From their observations it follows that the patient is the focus of the planned medical care. 64 out of 68 students present at the camp stated that patient well-being is one of the main objectives of the therapeutic team. This implies that students have theoretical knowledge of the relevance of the functioning of such team [18].

Both Gardner et al. and the students at the camp observed that cooperation between therapeutic team members can reduce costs related to the ward maintenance and medical treatment. Such a view is held by 30 out of 72 respondents. The money saved in this way could be spent on professional trainings of the ward personnel, which is a moral and ethical obligation of every public health care employee [19].

According to Curran et al., communication lays the foundation for cooperation in a therapeutic team. They claim that continuous workshops and training sessions to enhance inter-personnel communication have a decisive influence on the patient’s further medical care. At the Działdowo research camp, 55 out of 67 students maintained that communication between other members of the interdisciplinary team and hospital personnel was improved. They also think that these effects may be attributed particularly to the specific nature of work in Działdowo [20].

Cooper et al. proved that by cooperating in the therapeutic team, students raise their self-esteem and master their professional skills. By exchanging experiences with one another, students point to key elements of care provided in particular diseases. Działdowo students also declared they had upgraded their professional skills and knowledge in many numerous fields [21].
V. CONCLUSIONS

- The creation of the therapeutic team is a good idea. 64 out of 68 respondents declared their interest in setting up a therapeutic team in their future workplace, whereas 98.5% of them would like to join such teams.
- The functioning of the therapeutic team is beneficial to patients and the hospital. 86.3% of respondents believe that the therapeutic team aims to mainstream patient course of treatment.
- Responsibilities and objectives of the team are known to students, who are also acquainted with its composition. 70 out of 72 respondents claim that the team should be composed of a doctor, nurse, dietician, psychologist and physiotherapist.
- According to 78.8% respondents, inter-personal communication between the team and patients at the camp was improved. 82.1% respondents regard the intra-team communication between students to be satisfying.
- 60.3% of respondents have positively changed their perception of the concept and understanding of the definition of a therapeutic team. The respondents declare their further interest in setting up a therapeutic team in their future workplace.

VI. REFERENCES
