

# Team-trained health care staff can reduce patient deaths by 15 percent

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Team training of health care employees can reduce patient mortality by 15 percent, according to a new study from Rice University, the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, the University of Central Florida, the U.S. Department of Defense and the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center.

"Saving Lives: A Meta-Analysis of Team Training in Health Care" found that team [training](#) can also reduce medical errors by 19 percent. Team training is an instructional strategy aimed at improving team-based knowledge, skills, attitudes and problem-solving interactions. It focuses on developing coordination, cooperation, communication, leadership and other team-based skills. Team members train in specific roles while performing specific tasks and interact or coordinate to achieve a common goal or outcome.

"Medical error has an estimated economic impact between \$735 billion to \$980 billion annually in the United States alone," said Eduardo Salas, the Allyn R. and Gladys M. Cline Chair and Professor of Psychology at Rice and one of the study's authors. "In addition, estimates indicate that preventable medical errors occur in one out of every three hospital admissions. The evidence is clear: Medical error causes patient harm, and much of this error is preventable. Team training is one possible way to prevent such errors from ever happening."

The researchers reported that 19 percent of trainees had, in general, positive reactions to team training. (The remaining trainees were neutral

on the topic.) The group training also improved employees' learning of new skills by 31 percent and on-the-job use of these skills by 25 percent. Financial outcomes of [health care](#) organizations were improved by 15 percent. Finally, team training was associated with a 34 percent improvement in clinical performance and 15 percent increase in [patient satisfaction](#).

"Team training has the potential to teach individuals how to better communicate, cooperate and resolve conflicts in workplace settings, including health care," Salas said. "Ultimately, we found that team training is effective and useful in this field and can ultimately save money and, more importantly, lives."

Salas said the study's results are encouraging and demonstrate that [health care organizations](#) can see moderate to large improvements in their employees' performance and organizational results by participating in a health care team-training program.

The study examined the impact of training in team settings among 23,018 participants in 129 prior studies. The previous research examined how team training impacted quality of care, customer service, patient satisfaction and other variables. Participants included health care providers (physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, etc.), allied health care personnel (nurses and therapists), health care staff (unit clerks) and health care students (medical students, nursing students, etc.) and came from facilities ranging from small clinics to large hospitals, both in the U.S. and abroad.

The article will appear in an upcoming edition of the *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

Provided by Rice University

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