



Managing tensions between Volunteers and Health Care Professionals

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This paper analyses reasons for tensions between volunteers and health care professionals working together within the health sector, and how these tensions can be managed, with implications for how the sector can best collaborate.

What precedes tensions between Volunteers and Healthcare Professionals, and how is this viewed differently by managers and volunteers?

Volunteers and paid staff both largely highlight the same causes for tensions, with both groups showcasing the importance of balanced, complimentary, but not overlapping, division of tasks and responsibilities. An approach of managing tensions requires balancing the push for collaboration with a loser structure of coercion.

[#Healthcare](#) [#Volunteers](#) [#Collaboration](#) [#Management](#) [#Professionals](#)

Background

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Context



- **Volunteering is having an increasing role in Health Care provisions**, often tackling elements which professionals lack the time and/or resources for, such as accompanying patients, providing administrative support, or information services
- The issue of inclusion of volunteers within Inter-professional collaboration is **under-researched, despite the increasing involvement within healthcare**
- Some existing literature found that **closer collaboration between volunteers and health professionals can actually worsen tensions** if handled without a correct understanding
- Poor relationships, and unaddressed tensions between, staff and volunteers has a **negative impact on both the quality of service, and the satisfaction of both staff and volunteers themselves**
- There is a difficulty for volunteer managers who must **balance clear definition of roles**, while **not over-formalising** and creating too much **rigidity for the volunteer**

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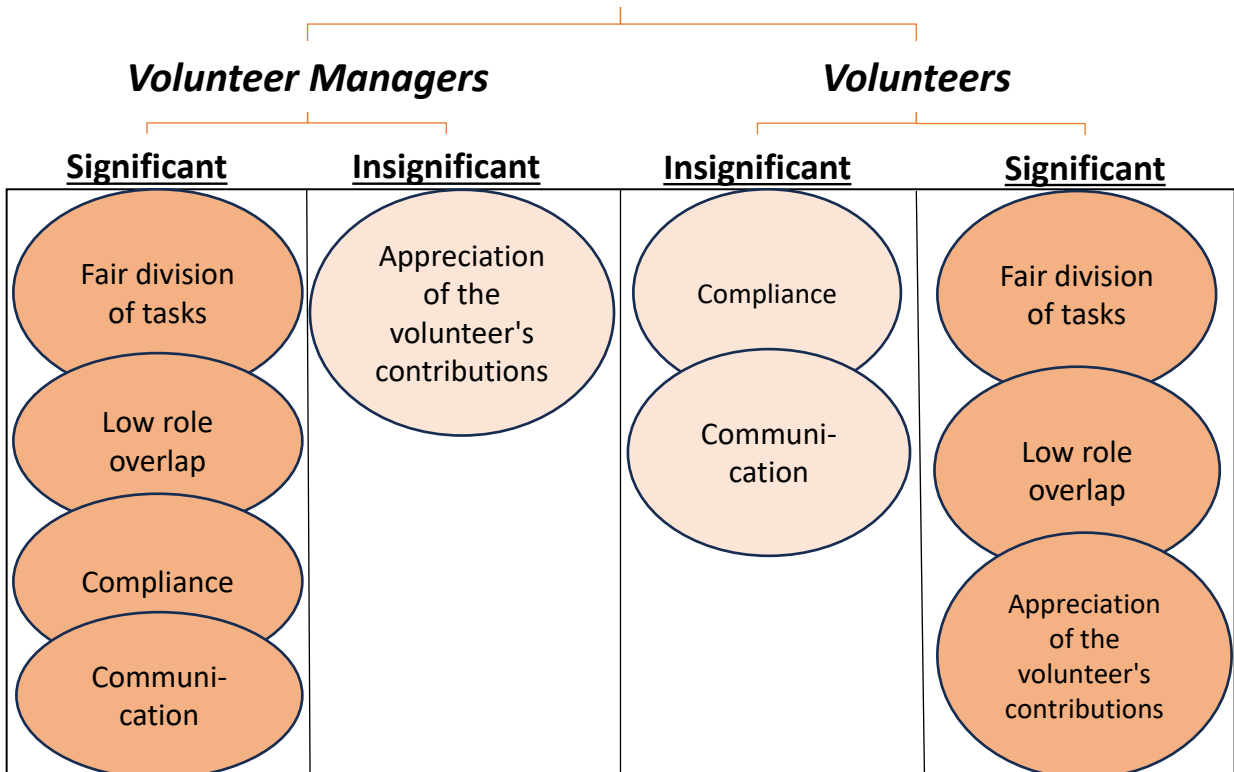
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Take aways & Learnings



- In a questionnaire of volunteer managers, with 127 responses, 11.6% reported tensions being at least partially common, with 8.9% in a sample of 319 volunteers reporting this.
- Tensions are highlighted in 4 categories based on the cause of the tension: *Status conflicts*, *Process conflicts*, *Task conflicts*, and *Relationship conflicts*.
- Volunteer Managers and Volunteers approach reducing tensions differently, with **managers focused on task and process related issues**, while **volunteers focus on relationship-issues**, for both sides, task division and role overlap is crucial though
- **Carefully managing, rather than trying to eliminate, tensions can be a more successful approach, through balancing a mix of integration of volunteers within the professional team, and a clear separation of tasks and responsibilities**

Factors for



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