European Journal of Special Education Research
ISSN: 2501 - 2428
ISSN-L: 2501 - 2428
Available on-line at: www.oapub.org/edu

DOI: 10.46827/ejse.v11i7.6496 Volume 11 | Issue 7 | 2025

THE ROLE OF THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM IN DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF I.E.P. IN A SELECTED SPECIAL SCHOOL IN THARAKA NTHI COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract:
An individualised education plan is the blueprint of the specialised curriculum that a learner with an exceptional program should follow to succeed in school. It also provides transition planning to ensure that the learner with exceptional needs, and more so, Intellectual Disability, becomes an educated, productive, and participating member of the community. The purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which Members of a multidisciplinary team have been involved in the development and utilization of I.E.P. This is mixed-method research that adopted a descriptive research design. The sample size of the research comprised 1 headteacher, 8 teachers and 126 learners. Piaget's Constructivist Theory of Learning guided the research. Respondents were identified through purposive sampling. Questionnaires and interview schedules were the tools used to collect data. Quantitative data were analyzed through SPSS software version 26. It was reported through descriptive statistics. Data obtained from the interviews were coded, read repeatedly to identify patterns, then themes, and were reported narratively. Findings indicate that MDT are inadequately involved in the development and implementation of Individualized Education Program in the selected institution of research. Among the major impediments to their full participation are a lack of common availability during scheduling, unfamiliarity with occupational jargon across occupations and a lack of administrative support.

Keywords: multidisciplinary team, I.E.P., special school, Tharaka Nthi County

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1. Introduction and Background to the Research

Intellectual disability (ID) refers to a form of disability that is characterized by observable limitations in adaptive behavior, intellectual functioning (problem solving, learning, and reasoning), and an intellectual quotient (IQ) between 70 and 75 or lower. According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (2018), about 3% (200 million) of the world`s population has an intellectual disability, with about 80% found in developing countries, with 2-3% of children suffering from the condition. Further, 90% of children with ID, especially in low-income countries, do not attend school due to inadequacy or lack of individualized programs for their special needs.

In the U.S., 6% of all disabled students between 3-21 years served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act have intellectual disability. They constitute about 34% of all students receiving special education services, especially in public schools (Special Education Performance Determination Report, 2017). Such achievements have been associated with the ability of the U.S. Department of Education to timely and effectively identify learners with intellectual disability and ensure the use of IEP. In Australia, about 3% of the population has ID, with the majority aged over 65 years. About 45% of students with ID attend ordinary classes compared to 95% of students with other forms of disability. Further, 29% of ID students in Australia moved from ordinary classes to specialized schools in the 5-year age cohort, while only 28% did not receive additional specialized education (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2008). This has been associated with the government's efforts to promote specialized education for such students through the construction of appropriate schools, curriculum, and training of teachers in special education. Similar success has been observed in Spain, where about 50,000 school-aged children (below 18 years) have ID (Statista, 2015). In Spain, government policies such as curriculum for training teachers on special needs and for teaching students and construction of individualized schools and classes have promoted education for students with ID. In such schools, students are taught using materials that are unique to their abilities. Teachers also have special skills centered around the abilities of their students, hence there is minimal discrimination in class, limited stigmatization, and biased discrimination. This ensures that learners with ID are motivated to achieve optimum academic performance.

In Africa, not much has been achieved in this area compared to the above-mentioned developed countries. In South Africa, there are about 465 special schools and another 715 that provide full services for learners with special needs (Adnams, 2010). However, despite the availability of schools, poor enforcement of the available policy guidelines limits accessibility and academic performance for learners with ID. In Egypt, about 0.5% of children below the age of 15 years are affected by ID. However, unlike South Africa, they have better access to individualized education programs due to the efforts of the government to develop such programs. For instance, there are about 450 special schools for students with disabilities, while about 215 of them are for learners with ID (Abdelhammed, 2010). Further, the curriculum is learner-oriented, where curriculum

goals are in line with students` abilities, resulting in remarkable progress. The Ugandan education system has invested little effort in learners with intellectual disability. According to UNICEF (2016), 21.9% of disabilities among children are cases of ID. However, only 6% are enrolled in primary schools, while 66% of the enrolled end up dropping out. This has been associated with ineffectiveness of the government in developing programs such as individualized programs which ensure that learners with ID have access to special schools, curriculum, classrooms, learning and teaching materials and teachers who have specialized training and understand their needs. Similarly, there has been limited research on special education, where different categories of learners are identified with their special needs, hence promoting their educational outcomes. This has been reflected in the inadequacy of special schools and the lack of special schools dedicated to ID, hence the observed poor indicators in relation to enrolment, retention and completion of school by learners with ID.

In Kenya, about 2.5% of all disability cases constitute children with ID (Adams, 2010). However, while the enrolment rate among such children is high compared to Uganda, the school completion rate remains low due to a high dropout rate (Kahongeh, 2018). This has been associated with a number of factors, such as inadequate individualized programs, inadequate funding, inadequate training, and high levels of illiteracy among parents. About 79% of head teachers in integrated primary schools and special units have no training on special needs education, while only 2% have a master's degree in special needs education. This is despite the fact that there are about 73 education centers nationwide that are devoted to education assessment and resource mobilization for the Individualized Education Program (IEP) (KIPPRA, 2018).

It is acknowledged that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and its articles 23, 28, and 29 in the Kenyan Constitution emphasize the right to education of children with disabilities. Additionally, according to Article 23, children with disabilities of any sort are entitled to particular care and assistance so they can reach their full potential and become independent adults. Article 53 (1) (b) of the Kenyan constitution further declares that all children have the right to free and obligatory basic education; however, this is not the case in schools for students with mental disabilities. The Ministry of Education has lagged in providing the required resources for the development and use of IEP, with limited teacher experts leading to many students dropping out of school without being well guided. However, where the program has been implemented, learners are assessed and placed under a curriculum with intervention programs to increase their comfort and their educational goals.

The role of the multidisciplinary team is quite critical in writing and implementing an effective I.E.P. It ensures a holistic approach, providing an opportunity for professionals and participants from different fields to assess a learner's needs, plan and ensure that appropriate strategies are selected and implemented for the purposes of education of the learner with special needs in question (Travers, 2020).

2. Statement of the Problem

Intellectual disability remains one of the most common forms of disability that affects children and their ability to participate in education. Its occurrence is commonly observed at birth as a result of infections, chromosomal abnormalities, metabolic disorders, or nutritional factors. Since such factors are common in developing countries, about 80% of intellectually challenged cases are found in developing countries, limiting the ability of children with such conditions from achieving their life goals (IDEAL 2013). Intellectually challenged persons present with low IQ, leading to observable challenges in the ability to reason, learn, and solve problems. They also have critical challenges in adaptive skills.

All children have a right to free, appropriate education in Kenya. It is important to ensure that learners with ID access education, employment, and live an independent life as realistically as possible. To achieve this, the use of Individualized Education Plan (I.E.P.) is quite critical as it plays the role of a blueprint from which an individualized curriculum and transition planning are anchored.

However, due to inadequate development of individualized programs and their eventual use, there is low enrollment, class participation, transition from one class to the next and overall academic achievement. Further, participation of intellectually challenged individuals in economic activities has been poor due to low participation in education (Chavan & Rozrtkar, 2015). One important factor that leads to the failure or success of the development and use of I.E.P. is the involvement of the multidisciplinary team. A myriad of challenges exist, and unless this is addressed, education for learners with ID remains compromised. Learners with ID have multiple needs and challenges. Specialists, related service providers and parents need to work as a team to ensure effective education and transitioning for learners with intellectual disabilities.

2.1 Research Objective

The main objective of this research was to evaluate the role of the multidisciplinary team in the development and implementation of IEPs in the selected Special Needs School for learners with intellectual disabilities in Tharaka Nthi County.

2.2 Limitations

There is a lot of stigma and superstition surrounding the field of disabilities in Kenya. This is especially so in the area of intellectual disabilities. As a result, some of the expected responses could be compromised. To address this, the researchers ensured lengthy preliminary and pre-research interaction with the participants to create rapport and enhance trust. They were also made to understand that the research findings will better ameliorate the current perceptions and education of learners with ID.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Piaget's Constructivist theory of learning served as the study's guiding principle. According to Piaget, humans create knowledge and meaning depending on their experiences. The basic assumption exemplified by this theory is that it is virtually impossible to control what students learn and that learning is a process that can lead to different results for different students. In this regard, even under the same learning environments, materials, teachers, and concepts, each student will end up constructing their own unique meaning out of materials, dependent upon the uniqueness of their cognitive processes.

Students are more devoted to learn what is interesting to them as opposed to what is given to them. An individualised education plan written by an effective multidisciplinary team will take into consideration students' preferred learning style strategies and needs. When an appropriate learning environment is available, appropriate materials, strategy and support are used, learning will effectively take place through constructivism.

3. Brief Literature Review on The Role of the Multidisciplinary Team in the Development and Use of IEPs

Yoshida (2013) described a team with multiple specialities as a collection of people from several disciplines who collaborate to achieve a shared goal. The researcher conducted a descriptive survey research design where 10 head teachers were randomly selected and issued with questionnaires. The research determined the efficacy of using multidisciplinary teams and elaborated on their roles and responsibilities in developing and using IEPs. In this regard, a multidisciplinary team evaluates learners for placements in special education. They also prepare IEPs for pupils based on their particular requirements following an evaluation of the student's strengths, weaknesses and needs. Evaluation of students was found to be the major role and responsibility of the multidisciplinary team. The role involves collecting data such as a learner’s medical history and educational performance, conducting formal and informal assessments, creating a baseline performance guide to develop IEPs, and evaluating the effectiveness of the IEP. Regarding the development of IEPs, the multidisciplinary team is responsible for setting goals and objectives, establishing benchmarks, and designing plan outlines and services to support and enable the child to achieve his or her educational goals. Despite the stipulated roles of multidisciplinary teams, efficacy is still an enormous challenge in handling intellectually disabled learners, henceforth this research.

Fleming and Fleming (2015), on the other hand, assert that IEP team members have both individual and overall roles and responsibilities. Some of the key responsibilities noted include attending and participating in IEP and collaborative meetings to determine whether learners should receive AT devices. Assist with information gathering and monitoring, and, lastly, provide training and communication to parents, professionals, and students.

Bakken and Obiakor (2017) also reached a similar conclusion in their paper, which sought to determine the role of educators in multidisciplinary teams for learners with special needs. The researchers used a descriptive research design in Lagos, Nigeria, targeting 54 teachers and 12 head teachers and asking them what they thought the roles of multidisciplinary teams were. Just like the other findings discussed above, the majority of participants argued that evaluation was a major role of the team, with a minority believing that they played a key role in developing an efficient IEP program for the learners with disabilities. The study establishes various roles of the team, including evaluation and training. However, it does not elaborate on individual roles of the team members, especially since the respondents tended to provide individual responses rather than the roles of all the team members. Additionally, the majority of the information on the role of the multidisciplinary team was not succinct, calling on future researchers to conduct a more in-depth study in which the variables are well-defined to provide a conclusive examination of the team's roles and responsibilities in developing and using the IEPs.

4. Research Methodology

This is mixed-method research that adopted a descriptive research design. Descriptive studies are crucial because they help us understand what occurs in learning environments without manipulating variables (Bakker, 2018). The researchers collect data without in any way interfering with the school setting. They described the situation as it was.

4.1 Sample Procedures and Sample Size

Purposive sampling was used to select the headteacher/teachers who took part in the research. A purposeful sampling technique was utilized to sample parent representatives as well. The study sample comprised the 1 head teacher and 5 teachers; 1 female and 3 male teachers (50% for each), 1 preschool teacher, and 1 county education officer. The sample size of 133 respondents is distributed as shown in the table below.

Table 1: Sample Matrix

Category	**Sample Size**		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**
Head teacher	1	0	1
Teachers	3	1	4
Pre-school teacher	0	1	1
Students	69	57	126
County education officer	1	0	1
Total	**74**	**59**	**133**

4.2 Research Instruments

The research utilized the following research instruments:

4.2.1 Teachers Questionnaire

There was a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire with two sections. Section A of the questionnaire contained questions on personal data, and Section B, captured relevant data on the perceptions of participation of MDT in writing and implementation of I.E.P.

4.2.2 Interview Schedules

The researcher conducted a 30-minute one-to-one interview with the head teacher and the county education officer. They were asked questions that would help them give their perceptions on the role and concern of MDT in writing and implementation of I.E.P. This played a corroborative role to better expound on the responses in the Likert scale.

4.3 Data Collection Technique

Questionnaires and an interview schedule were used in the data collection process. After receiving approval and acquiring the required licenses from the appropriate authorities, data collection was carried out. To start with, the researchers employed questionnaires to gather information from educators on the role of MDT in writing and implementation of I.E.P.

The researchers then conducted interviews with the education officer and the head teacher.

4.4 Data Analysis and Presentation

Quantitative data were cleaned, coded, and fed into SPSS software edition 26 for analyses. After repeatedly reading the qualitative data, themes and patterns were established and presented narratively.

4.5 Logistical and Ethical Considerations

The researcher acquired research permission from NACOSTI in accordance with the law and university policies. Furthermore, all participants signed informed consent. In the consent form, participants were all guaranteed confidentiality. They were made to understand that the data collected would be used only for this research. They were also made to understand that the data collected during the research was stored under lock and key. Only the researcher had access to it. Participants would not be identified, and only pseudonyms would be used.

5. Data Analysis, Presentations and Discussions

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of the multidisciplinary team in writing and implementation of I.E.P. This section gives an in-depth analysis and discussion of the findings.

5.1 General Characteristics of the Sample

Below is a summary of the respondents' characteristics. Not much is discussed because this was not a research objective.

5.1.1 Response Rate

The table below summarises the study's response rates across the sampled categories.

Table 2: Response Rate

Category	Male	Female	Total	Final sample	Response rate (%)
Head teacher	1	0	1	1	100.0%
Teachers	3	1	4	4	100.0%
Pre-school teacher	0	1	1	1	100.0%
Students	69	57	126	121	96.0%
County education officer	1	0	1	1	100.0%
Total	**74**	**59**	**133**	**128**	**96.2%**

5.1.2 Demographic Information of the Respondents

This section presents the demographic profiles of teachers and head teachers who participated in the study. The table below represents the demographic distribution of the teachers who participated in the research.

Table 3: Demographic Information of Teachers

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Designation	Deputy Head Teacher	1	20.0
	Senior Teacher	1	20.0
	Teacher	3	60.0
Years in Current School	0–5 years	2	40.0
	6–10 years	1	20.0
	11–15 years	1	20.0
	>15 years	1	20.0
Professional Qualification in SNE	Certificate	2	40.0
	Diploma	1	20.0
	Degree	1	20.0
	Masters	1	20.0
	Others	0	0.0
Teaching Experience	0–5 years	1	20.0
	6–10 years	2	40.0
	11–15 years	1	20.0
	>15 years	1	20.0

5.3 What Is the Role of the Multidisciplinary Team in the Development and Use of IEPs in a Special School for Intellectually Challenged Learners?

This study sought to investigate the role of the multidisciplinary team in the development and implementation of IEPs in the selected special school for learners with intellectual disabilities. The data is based on responses from teachers regarding various statements about their views and experiences related to the role of the multidisciplinary team. The

items were rated on a scale of presence/compliance of 0=No, 1=partly and 2=yes (fully complied). Quantitative findings are presented in the table below, which shows the frequency and percentage of responses on various MDT practices.

Table 4: Role of Multidisciplinary Team

Item	0	1	2	Mean	% Full Compliance
MDT meeting this term	1(16.7%)	2(33.3%)	3(50.0%)	1.33	50.0%
Parent participation	0 (0.0%)	2(33.3%)	4(66.7%)	1.67	66.7%
Specialist input included	2(33.3%)	2(33.3%)	2(33.3%)	1.00	33.3%
Action points with timelines	1(16.7%)	3(50.0%)	2(33.3%)	1.17	33.3%
Follow-up date recorded	2(33.3%)	2(33.3%)	2(33.3%)	1.00	33.3%
Subtotal (Max=10)	-	-	-	**6.17**	-

The table above indicates that half of the respondents (3, 50.0%) reported that MDT meetings had been fully held during the term, while 2 (33.3%) indicated they were only partly held, and 1 (16.7%) reported no meetings at all. This suggests a moderate but inconsistent culture of convening MDT sessions. This indicates that there were challenges in participation of MDT in the development and implementation of I.E.P. action points, follow-up and timelines were also a major area of concern (Bagadood *et al.*, 2022). To triangulate this, qualitative data below was collected. There was clear corroboration of the inadequacy of Participation of MDT. Asked to comment about the state of MDT participation in the development and implementation of I.E.P. in the selected school for learners with intellectual disabilities, the following was the head teacher's response.

> *"Ideally, I know we are supposed to meet at least annually to review learners' I.E.P. While this is the case, it is sometimes challenging because some parents fail to avail themselves for meetings and at the same time, getting all stakeholders together at a common time is usually quite difficult. Some learners require speech therapists and occupational therapists in the I.E.P. meetings. Most of the specialists are unwilling to participate because no income is associated with the meeting. A speech therapist makes a lot of money while practicing privately. Other challenges include resources and unfavorable parental participation".* (Headteacher)

Multidisciplinary teams are critical in education and the provision of services for learners with intellectual disabilities. Research has consistently shown that MDT create a holistic approach in intervention strategies (Travers, 2020). The teams are comprised of diverse professionals who collaborate to support the academic, social, and emotional well-being of learners with intellectual disabilities. Among the many challenges faced by the teams is creating a common time, coordinating different opinions from the experts and highlighting areas of ongoing improvements (Bagadood & Saigh, 2022). Below are key emerging themes from the above data.

5.3.1 Parent Participation

A notable strength emerged in parental participation, with 4(66.7%) of respondents indicating full compliance, while 2(33.3%) indicated partial compliance. While this is the case, one of the teachers complained of inconsistencies and lukewarm participation of some parents.

> *"Parents give valuable insights, but most lack technical understanding of IEP formulation, we need more awareness sessions for them. On the same note, some do not fully participate in the meetings while others decline to share valuable information that could otherwise help the team in making crucial decisions"* (Teacher 1)

Parents play a critical role as members of the Multidisciplinary committee. No one knows the child with intellectual disability more than the parent. Legally, they are required to be automatic members of the I.E.P. committee. When parents fail to participate or withhold information from the rest of the team, this negatively impacts the quality of the I.E.P derived and intervention strategies. Precisely, they form vital partners and experts for their children. They share critical insights and knowledge from home (Swafta *et al.*, 2025).

It is evident from the responses above that not all parents attend I.E.P meetings or play their respectful roles as members of MDT. The above findings is line with recent research that found some members of the MTD fail to participate fully due to stigma issues. This mostly affects parents of individuals with Severe intellectual disabilities (Chisela & Sememba 2025). Further, research by Elser (2017) found that parents may fail to fully participate in I.E.P meetings for various reasons. Among the perceived reasons are difficulty in maintaining relationships, emotional challenges, previously made goals and negative influence from others.

5.3.2 Specialist's Input

Specialist contribution was one of the weakest aspects, with only 2(33.3%) reporting full compliance, 2(33.3%) partial, and 2(33.3%) none. Many learners with intellectual disabilities have comorbidities that require specialists to intervene. Such include speech and otor skill challenges. It is a big concern that many specialists do not participate in I.E.P meetings in the special school of research. The headteacher, when interviewed on the matter, noted the following.

> *"As noted earlier, it is challenging to find time when all the specialists are freely available. On the same note, some specialists differ in opinion during meetings. This can make it hard for the team to make speedy collaborative decisions. Others undermine one another during the meeting. Further, many specialists feel demotivated to leave their lucrative business or clinics to attend meetings where they make nothing financially. The ministry does not provide any allowance to reinforce them. Their participation is entirely voluntary".* (Headteacher)

Looking at the above responses, it is clear that MDT meetings face, among other challenges, scheduling difficulties. It is a challenge to have common time when all specialists are available (Law *et al.*, 2024). This is in line with research by Agadood *et al.* (2022) that found major setbacks to the multidisciplinary team that include undefined roles and scheduling difficulties. Equally, interpersonal conflict and lack of coordination frustrate MDT. However, Baukol (2020) observes that addressing scheduling time could be ameliorated by virtual meetings.

5.3.3 Action Points with Timelines

Only 2(33.3%) reported full compliance in recording actionable points with timelines, with half 3(50.0%) indicating partial compliance and 1(16.7%) none. This suggests that while discussions take place, formalizing and tracking actions remain a weak area. Without documented timelines, accountability and progress monitoring are compromised. It is critical to not only share responsibilities but set deadlines in I.E.P meetings.

Asked to comment about timelines in relation to set goals, one of the teachers had the following to say.

> *"We all understand the importance of setting and meeting timelines and deadlines in I.E.P meetings, but sometimes there is too much pressure to meet academic goals from the administration. This leaves us with no alternative but to ignore some of the non-academic goals in the IEP. The ministry sets goals for me, especially now that we are moving to CBC. This is a new curriculum that is really time-consuming".* (Teacher 1)

> *"We rarely meet or set deadlines. Or if we do, we do not get enough support from the administration. Too, it is difficult to have frequent review meetings given that some of the multidisciplinary team members are specialists practicing privately. Our head teacher is also overburdened by administrative duties".* (Teacher 2)

> *"We do sometimes set goals and deadlines, but we have challenges keeping track. With meetings taking place annually and infrequently, tracking is a major challenge".* (Teachers 3)

Looking at the above responses, it is notable that teachers fail to get adequate support from administrators in the IEP process, including setting and meeting deadlines. On the same note, there is too much pressure on teachers regarding matters related to CBC. As well, there are tracking problems owing to infrequent meetings. This is in line with several recent research findings.

Wangari (2014) associated it with administrators lacking adequate managerial training as well as lacking special education training. Research also indicates that administrators get "burnout' in special education settings, often due to insufficient staff,

workload, overwhelming number of learners and communication breakdown (Kashaka, 2025).

5.3.4 Follow-Up Dates Recorded

Similarly, follow-up scheduling was underdeveloped, with only 2(33.3%) reporting full compliance, 2(33.3%) partial, and 2(33.3%) none. When asked to comment on follow-up dates, the CSO said the following:

> *"I must admit that due to many other responsibilities, follow-up has been a challenge. As mentioned earlier, I also lack a proper background in I.E.P matters and Special education".* (CSO)

While coordination is valuable, the absence of formalized follow-up may hinder evaluation of IEP effectiveness. This finding is in line with Yoshida's (2013) emphasis on continuous evaluation as a key MDT role, and with Fleming and Fleming's (2015) and Bakken and Obiakor's (2017) warnings that weak monitoring structures can erode program fidelity. Among challenges related to monitoring in special education are poor staff training, lack of resources, lack of standardized systems, inconsistent data collection and poor coordination and communication (Brenda, 2024).

6. Summary of Findings

This research aimed at investigating the role of the multidisciplinary team in the preparation and implementation of I.E.P. Below is a summary, conclusion and recommendation.

A significant number of respondents agreed that stakeholder consensus was achieved during the formulation of individualized education programs (IEPs), while inadequate coordination among multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) was noted. There is a great concern among stakeholders that MDT, while appreciated, does not effectively collaborate to improve writing and implementation of I.E.P. Getting common meeting times, communication among members are some of the barriers to the effective role that MDT should play in the development and implementation of I.E.P for learners with ID.

7. Conclusion

All educators appreciate the role of the MDT team in the education of learners with intellectual disabilities. There were concerns about scheduling time, personality issues and communication barriers. Some members were also not familiar with the jargon used across areas of specialization. It is not enough to have a multidisciplinary team for policy purposes only. If it is not meeting as required, then it beats its purpose. Each member has an area of expertise but must work collaboratively with the others. No entity is greater than the other.

8. Recommendations

8.1 Recommendations for the Ministry of Education

Ministry to educate the society and education stakeholders on the role of the MDT team in the education of learners with intellectual disabilities. Funding should also be available to reinforce specialists who participate in MDT. It is also important to train all members of MDT on collaboration and teamwork.

8.2 Recommendation for Practitioners

School administrators should enhance collaboration more actively, including reinforcement for participants, such as parents and other related stakeholders. Deliberate efforts should be put into creating awareness and reinforcing the participation of members of the disciplinary team. Deliberate effort should be made to arrange a meeting with convenient timing to ensure possible attendance by all members of MDT. On the same note, members also need to appreciate that participation should not always be about money. It makes sense to give back to society and play one's patriotic duty.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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