

Keeping it Real: Inter-Occupational Guardians and Reform Implementation in Two Community Health Centers

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One of the difficulties associated with changing institutionalized practices in professional organizations is that professionals often meet reform efforts with strong resistance. In this 18-month ethnographic study of two inner-city health centers implementing a program designed to reduce healthcare disparities, I demonstrate that, when reform implementation requires members of different professions to collaborate with one another, each profession must encounter the impure diagnosis, inference, and treatment-work of the other profession. This is problematic because professionals' expertise, identity, and status depend on doing professionally honorable, "real" work. When collaboration is required for reform implementation, *inter-occupational guardians*— a separate group of actors who safeguard each groups' work by presenting each with problems defined wholly in the conceptual categories of their own profession—can be critical to the change process.