

Listen to my story: Contribution of patients to their healthcare through effective communication with doctors

Health Services Management Research

0(0) 1–15

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DOI: 10.1177/0951484820952308

journals.sagepub.com/home/hsm**Harbir Singh**  and **Ajoy Kumar Dey**

Abstract

In the era of patient centered healthcare, patients are educated, more aware and demanding than ever. However, there is a significant misalignment between patients and doctors due to improper communication resulting in broken patient-doctor therapeutic relationships and degraded quality of healthcare. This suggests that patients have a greater and mature role to play in their healthcare. The paper aims to fill this gap by studying the contribution of patients in their healthcare through patient-doctor communication in selected Indian multispeciality hospitals. Qualitative multi-case study was steered and in-depth interviews of thirteen patients, twelve doctors were conducted along with the secondary data analysis of more than 600 pages of the documents from the official websites of the sample hospitals. Grounded theory three level coding revealed the themes of contribution of patients in through effective communication. The results indicate that patients contribute to their healthcare through effective communication by demonstrating association with doctors, reflecting reciprocally, resolving communication challenges and supporting their overall treatment process. The paper extends the literature on patient's contribution in their healthcare. It presents clear and succinct implementable implications and distinctive ways in which patients cooperate with the doctors, work mutually, improves communication and strengthen their overall healthcare process.

Keywords

case study, doctor communication, hospital, patient communication, patient contribution

Introduction

Communication of patients with the doctors is widely regarded as the core element of patient care in hospitals. Researchers, doctors, and patients themselves strongly agree that the communication itself can make or break the treatment of the patients.¹ Clear signals indicate that in-patients communicate with doctors to express their daily thoughts and emotions such as pain or discomfort, clarify disease and medication-related doubts and understand the opinions of concerned doctors on the immediate future course of action and precautions that patients need to take post-discharge.² In line with the choices of in-patients, researchers argue that verbal, face to face communication is the most powerful way to communicate effectively with the doctors.³

Constructs of patient–doctor communication

Effective communication is ‘*exchange of thoughts, emotions, facts or opinions of two or more persons*’.⁴

Effective communication can lead to reassurance, provide motivation incentives and support to the patients. It strengthens the self-confidence of the in-patients, provides tangible paybacks such as higher patient satisfaction.⁵ The most impactful communication between in-patients and doctors is friendly, encouraging, verbally recognizes each other's involvement, open, empathetic, relaxed, attentive and leaves a long-lasting positive imprint. As a result, outcomes such as physical, mental and emotional health of the patient improve.⁶ Patients add value in their healthcare by building a positive relationship with the doctors^{7,8} and clarifying their disease-specific doubts.^{9,10} Researchers also believe that patients follow the process

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