

IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION IN PATIENT CARE

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COMMUNICATION

Effective communication occurs only if the receiver understands the exact information or idea that the sender intended to transmit.

- Effective communication is the foundation of any health care team. Conversely poor or non-existent communication can negatively impact patient care.

- Communication is at the heart of everything we do in our society.
- It is particularly important in health care, where patients can feel vulnerable, alone and frightened.

Why is effective communication important in Hospitals..??

- Asnani M.R, in a research study on PATIENT-PHYSICIAN COMMUNICATION conducted in 2009 ,published in WEST INDIAN MEDICAL Journal that
- **“EXTENSIVE RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THAT NO MATTER HOW KNOWLEDGEABLE A CLINICIAN MIGHT BE, IF HE OR SHE IS NOT ABLE TO OPEN GOOD COMMUNICATION WITH THE PATIENT , HE OR SHE MAY BE OF NO HELP”.**

Role of effective communication in health care and its relative impact in patient outcomes

- Studies conducted during the past 3 decades show that the clinicians' ability to explain, listen and empathize can have a profound effect on biological and functional health outcomes as well as patient satisfaction and experience of care.

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- Patients' perceptions of the quality of the health care they received are highly dependent on the quality of their interactions with their health care clinician and team.
- The connection that a patient feels with his or her clinician can ultimately improve their health, mediated through participation in their care, adherence to treatment, and patient self-management.

Need for effective communication between a Clinician and Patient

- The very concept of effective communication is useful in Hospital settings to provide the utmost care to the patient , the steps where communication is most used are in
 - a) To arrive at an ACCURATE DIAGNOSIS
 - b) To have a positive PATIENT OUTCOME at discharge.
 - c) So that the patient COMPLIES with the Doctor
 - d) PATIENT SAFETY.
 - e) To avoid any LITIGATIONS.

Need for effective communication between a Clinician and Patient

- The absolute need for this communication basically lies in the fact that if a Health Care Professional gives adequate time for the patient to open up and reveal his/her complete history regarding the problems it would be of much help to come to an **accurate Diagnosis**.
- Incomplete stories /history leads to incomplete data upon which clinical decisions are made.

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- When interruptions occur, the patient may perceive that what they are saying is not important and leads to patients being reticent to offer additional information.
- The bottom line is that when patients are interrupted, it is a deterrent to collecting essential information and it hinders the relationship.

- The relative impact is such that the **patient outcomes** are not so upto the mark.
- Keeping that in mind the patient doesn't **comply** to the orders given by the Doctor at the time of discharge or at the time of leaving the out patient unit.
- Thus leading to a state where **patient safety** shall be questioned which may lead to unavoidable **litigations**.

Role of effective communication in Patient satisfaction

- a) Patient satisfaction increases when members of the healthcare team take the problem seriously
- b) explain information clearly
- c) try to understand the patient's experience
- d) provide viable options

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- Patient satisfaction improves when patients are encouraged to express their ideas, concerns and expectations.

Clinical team and their role in patient care.

- The clinical team in the Hospital include:
 - a) Doctor
 - b) Nursing staff
 - c) Pharmacists
 - d) Lab technicians
 - e) Physiotherapists

Roles

- **DOCTOR** plays a pivotal role in explaining the persisting health condition to the patients and their attendants in their native language, after clearly listening to the history of the patient pertaining to the problem.
- Doctor thereafter if needed would request the patient for admission and give his treatment plan in written format in the case sheet.
- If any surgery has to be performed , the Doctor even explains the procedure of the surgery to the patient and his/her attendants and obtain consent from them, which would be in printed form, after reading it aloud to them and make them understand .

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- **NURSING STAFF** , The next in hierarchy and who play an immense role are the nurses in the patient care.
- They would leave an impact on patient care by attending them at regular intervals and keep them updating regarding the course of treatment and keeping the patient at ease by assuring them regarding the patient's positive health outcomes.
- They follow up with the Doctor's regularly by attending the rounds.

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- **PHARMACY STAFF** help in patient care by dispensing the medicines which they are communicated through prescriptions written by the Doctor, if out patient, or by the Nursing staff(communicated to them through Consultants who write it in the running case sheet), if in patient.
- **LAB TECHNICIANS** understand the need of the requisition of the tests to be performed and communicate them on the basis of emergency, either by verbal mode or through the printed mode.

Non clinical team and their role in patient care

- The non clinical team mostly comprise of:
 - a) Public Relations Officers
 - b) Out patient Registration Staff
 - c) Out Patient Secretaries
 - d) Security personnel
- These people never directly are involved in the treatment of the patient, but they indirectly support patient care activities and interactions.

Roles

- **Public relations officers**, these officials are mostly from the local area and they mostly know the patients attending, so they play a role in patient care by helping the patient understand the need for Hospital care as they capture the trust of the patients.
- **Out patient registration staff**, they ask relevant questions to the patient and help them by giving a prescription paper which shall be duly filled by the Doctor.

Various modes of communication in Hospital attending to patient care.

Verbal , it almost goes without saying that a Doctor has to give clear attention to what he/she is saying to the patients in order to be clear, accurate , honest and appropriate. Tone of the voice is also an important aspect.

Written , Health services need to keep good written records of the care given to patients/clients for three main reasons:

- a) To make sure the care and treatment can continue to be given safely no matter which staff are on duty, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

b) To record the care that has been given to the patient.

c) To make sure there is an accurate record to be used as an **evidence** when there is a complaint from the patient about the care they have received .

The written communication should be simple and clear , near as possible to the time of delivery of health care, written legibly, especially in the prescriptions and also in the interdepartmental referrals and avoid giving personal opinions.

Printed where there are pamphlets etc printed regarding the various existing facilities in the Hospital.

Printed material are also seen in the form of consent forms for surgeries.

Signage where there are directions marked at each corner to help the patient to reach their destination for proper care.

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Non verbal communication is often described as body language which says a lot about the interest and engagement one is having.

Listening to what patients are saying- really listening- is a key skill, it means paying attention .

Questioning is of two types closed and open which help the patient to be comfortable.

Barriers to Communication in Medical setting.

- Effective communication helps establish trusting relationships, ensures information is passed and understood, and enriches people's lives. But all too often good communication is hampered by barriers, leading to misunderstandings, resentments, frustrations and demoralisation not only for patients, but also for health care staff

Barriers and overcoming them

- 1. Sensory problems such as sight, hearing and/or speech impairment** can be overcome by speaking slowly, listening carefully, not shouting at the hearing impaired instead pronounce slowly so that the person can see the lips and understand.
- 2. Patient confused or living with dementia-**
This barrier can be overcome by removing all distractions, such as radio, if playing, and find a quiet location where the patient can focus more easily

3. **Patient doesn't understand English/ native language** – This barrier can be overcome by imitating actions like eating, drinking, taking a short walk etc. More complex conversations will need the help of a trusted family member who speaks English or a translator.
4. If the environment is busy, noisy and lacking privacy, in such cases which are unavoidable, turning off the Radio, drawing the chair near to the patient, drawing curtains round the bed area, closing windows etc would help.

Role of communication in improving the inter personnel skills amongst health workers

- Many of the health care industries try developing the inter personnel skills amongst the health care workers by conducting seminars, practical sessions etc to improve the level of patient care , most of the sessions would be interactive with some demonstrations.

Miscommunication

- The problems leading to miscommunication are
 - a) Use of non standard terminology
 - b) Informal, rushed or inattentive interaction during handing over or transfer, including at hospital discharge.
 - c) Simple lack of co-ordination of care.
 - d) Writing the prescriptions in short forms.

Managing miscommunication

- Miscommunication can be overcome by the use of standardised form of communication, possibly through the use of checklists that provide a common and predictable structure regarding patient circumstances.
- When errors of communication are discovered, the error or misunderstanding should be addressed immediately and corrected.

Medication errors leading to poor patient safety

- Better communication is always needed to reduce medication errors.
- Medication errors are mostly seen at the time of
 - a) Dispensing of medicines at the pharmacy due to wrong interpretation of the prescriptions as the Pharmaceutical companies bring in various brand names.
 - b) During the administering of the drug to the patient in the wards.(wrong medicine to the wrong patient)
 - c) During surgeries where wrong side/site surgeries are the most commonly observed, due to incompetent communication skills
 - d) During inter departmental transfers of the patients, wherein the referrals or the need for transfer is not mentioned properly or legitimately by the Juniors of the team.

- To avoid such situations proper checklists have to be prepared and the same to be communicated to the health care team.
- **The purpose of a checklist is to detect a potential error before it leads to harm.**
- Human error in the complex world of modern medicine is inevitable, as mentioned in the famous quote *To Err is Human*.
- Checklists allow complex pathways of care to function with high reliability by giving users the opportunity to pause and take stock of their actions before proceeding to the next step.

Conclusion

- Improving collaborative and interactive communication will strengthen relationships with colleagues, enhance professional satisfaction, improve patient care outcomes and reduce the likelihood of litigations.
- By improving communication skills amongst the health care teams patient satisfaction can be improved along with mitigation of conflicts.
- Medication errors are preventable adverse effects of care if proper communication is established amongst health team

