

FACTORS RETARDING THE EFFICACY OF NURSING COMMUNICATION IN HOSPITALS AND STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME THEM

ADITI JAIN¹ & SHIVANI LAL²

¹Assistant Professor, Business Studies, Department of Commerce, The IIS University, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

²Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, The IIS University, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

ABSTRACT

With the globalisation and rapid increase in competitiveness of the economy, emphasis on improving the quality of care and services provided by the hospitals has enlarged. Hospitals are increasingly showing interest in expansion of effective internal communication in regard to nurses because nurses are the lifeline of hospitals in terms of patient care, pivotal in hospital efforts to gain credibility and improving the working efficiency of hospitals, so it is necessary to communicate with them timely, effectively, precisely and clearly. In the lieu of aforesaid factors, the aim of the study is to understand the communication obstacles faced by nurses in their duties in their hospital context and suggest the possible measures to reduce the communication gaps. To gather the information, data was collected from the nurses working in hospitals of Jaipur, through semi-structured interviews. Nurses were selected on the basis of their experience level, maturity and seniority for the study. The result of the study clearly brought out certain hindrances in internal communication among nurses and hospital management as change in work shifts, lack of work team involvement, strong opposition to change, fragmented work processes, poor senior-subordinates relationship, poor interpersonal relationship and job burnout. Thus, the results depicts that the communication among the hospitals are not always successful leading to more of confusion and performance deficits. To overcome the lacunae's in effective communication among the management and nurse's large number of lectures and conferences should be organized to impart training to the nurses and management staff to make them understand the role and importance of the communication and adverse effects of communication gaps on their job quality and the performance of the hospitals. Moreover, the factors that retard the smooth flow of communication in the hospitals should be eliminated or corrected. More stress should be given on face to face verbal communication. Above all, suggestions should be taken from nurses itself to suggest possible measures to enhance internal communication in the hospitals as they are most close and continuously working round the clock to provide their services to the patients and hospitals. Thus, effective communication is crucial for success of almost all the organizations to survive and excel in the economy.

KEYWORDS: Hospitals, Nurses, Internal Communication, Hindrances

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the bloodstream of every organization. To survive in this competitive world for long it is essential to have effective and quality communication with and for employees. It is essential for every organization to have an efficient and updated communication system to succeed and excel. Hospitals functions as one of the important organizations in service sector need to assess and audit its communication systems as the success of hospitals depend on effectiveness of their communication system and interaction among and with the staff members. Studies conducted during

past three decades show that the clinical ability to explain, listen and empathize can have profound effect on biological and functional health outcomes as well as patient satisfaction and experience of care[1].



SPHERES OF NURSES COMMUNICATION

Nurses being the lowest level of health care hierarchy and in constant and close touch with the patients are the edifice of the success of the health care sector and major reason for the patient's wellbeing after the physicians. Thus, effective, quality and timely communication is the crucial and significant aspect in quality of nursing care. Employing effective communication skills as a valuable tool enables nurses to assess the patients needs and provide them with the appropriate care, emotional support, knowledge transfer and exchange of information(Caris-Verhallen et al.,2004)[3]. Quality and desired communication resulting from appropriate nurse-doctor communication will lead to health promotion and increased performance of the hospitals. Nurses need to communicate at almost all the spheres of the hospitals effectively, adequately and timely. The various levels of nursing communications include:

- To communicate to assess the needs of healthcare consumers their families and friends.
- Conveys the information to health care consumers, their families and friends, the inter professional teams and physicians [4].
- Discloses observation or concern related to the hazard and errors in care or the practice environment at the appropriate level.
- To maintain adequate communication with the peers and subordinates to minimize the risk of health care delivery and to be in touch with the current requirements and progress.
- To discuss his/her own perspective on various agendas in the conferences or interpersonal meetings [5].
- Communicate effectively with each one and everyone from seniors to peers to subordinates to maintain and deliver quality services and timely results economically.
- Guides the colleagues in expanding their job knowledge, skill to perform the task, abilities and removal of doubts and confusions.
- To convey to the physicians the state of the health of the patients and to convey the deficiencies or requisites of

hospitals as a result of being in the close and constant touch of patients.

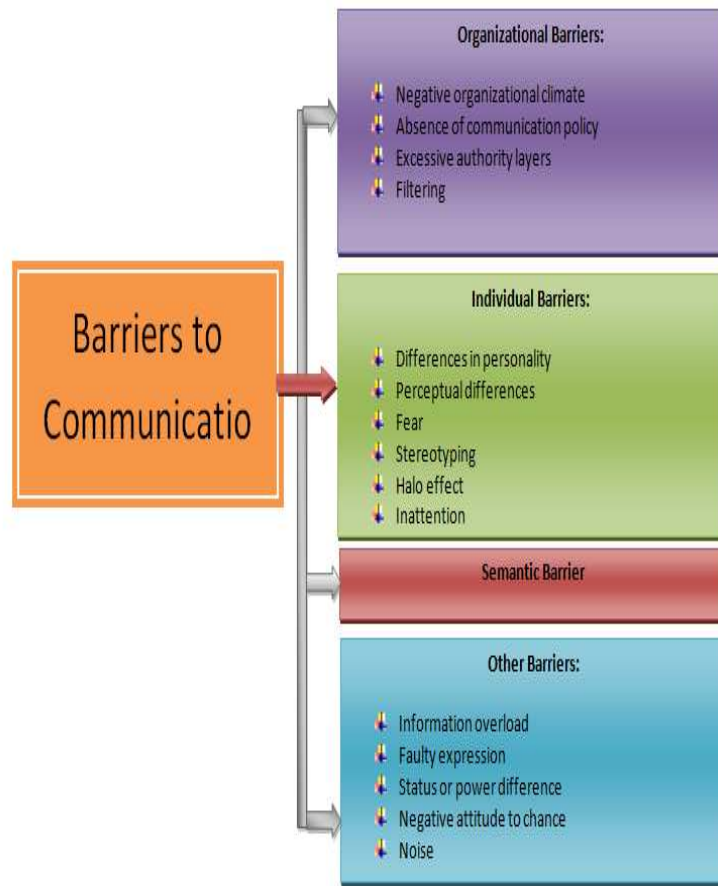
- Participates in mutual discussion to improve the healthcare outcomes.
- Valuable internal communication leads to healthy work relationship among the seniors and subordinates and peers with favourable job outcomes.

Impact of Effective Communications in Hospitals

“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”[6]



What are the Barriers to Effective Communications?



A communication barrier is anything that prevents you from receiving, exchanging and understanding the message, ideas, thoughts and information. These may be related to internal barrier and external barrier in the workplace.

Health care is sensitive, unpredictable sector where the need of intense and urgent communication can arise anytime all of a sudden. So, it is necessary to have clear communication channels and proper transparency in the communication every time within the physician and nurses round the clock as valuable and timely communication is the matter of life and death in the health sector. As a simple misunderstanding or a minor communication gap can result in irrecoverable losses to the patients or disrupt the entire functioning of health organization. The probable obstacles of effective communication in the health organisation can be related to:

The Message

- Lengthy messages.
- Confused messages.
- Vague language.
- Message not specific to the task.

Internal Barriers

- Fatigue.

- Disinterest.
- Poor listening skills.
- Poor senior subordinate relationship.
- Excessive work pressure
- Personal problems.
- Lack of staff involvement in managerial decisions.
- Structure of organisation that is flat, centralised.
- Attitude of senior management; “no need”, “problems too big”, “surely they already know-i do”, “it will cost too much” [7].
- Attitude of more junior managers; “just more work”, “not another meeting”, “additional bureaucracy” [7].
- Lousy bosses- who point blank refuse to communicate [7].
- Shortage of technological, man power and financial resources.
- Low pitch and tone hard to hear.

External Barriers

- Noise and other distractions.
- Unpleasant work environment
- Problems with technology and equipments

Some Real Fatal Consequences of Poor Communications

1) Toddler bled to death in hospital on a weekend due to “CATASTROPHIC” lack of communication between doctors.



- Two year old Tharun Umashankar died from bleeding of the stomach lining in U.K. He was rushed to Sheffield Children’s Hospital. Had bleed been discovered earlier, he could have had life saving surgery [8].

2) 13 year old girl Gricalda, died due to language barriers in internal health care communication.

- 13 year old Gricalda was admitted to emergency room of Aeizona hospital suffering from stomach pain. Girl's parents could only speak and understand Spanish and hospital staff could speak and understand only English. She was accompanied by her friend who served as a translator. She was diagnosed with the appendix and sadly died few hours later [9].

III Effects of Poor Communication on Hospitals

- Increase in cases of hospital negligence.
- Poor quality of care and treatments.
- Wastage of healthcare time and resources.
- Increase in hospital employees turnover rates.
- Increase in fatigue, burnout and organizational depersonalization.
- More of legal suits on hospitals due to medical malpractices.
- Poor senior subordinate relationship
- Unhealthy work environment.
- More of patient satisfaction.
- Increased goodwill of the hospitals and market credibility.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To gather the information, data was collected from the nurses working in hospitals of Jaipur, through semi-structured interviews. Nurses were selected on the basis of their experience level, maturity and seniority for the study. A sample of 20 nurses was selected for the study to gather the information about the managerial communication problem in two hospitals from Marudhar Hospital and Deep Hospital of Jaipur. The answers given by the nurses were named as A1, A2, A3...and so on in order to conceal their identities by not naming them. Three questions relevant to the problems of our study were asked from the nurses as:

- What communication problems do you face in the hospital management context?
- What are the effects of poor communication on the work efficiency and morale of the nurses?
- What are the suggestions of the hospital nurses to overcome the lacunas in communication system of hospitals?

RESULTS

In sample size of 20 nurses there were 17female and 3 male nurses. All were between 25 to 50 years of age with the working experience of 4 to 20 years in the nursing. They all were qualified and having the degrees in post graduation, diploma in nursing. The answers pertaining to the problem of internal communication in the hospital that were received were:

WHAT ARE THE COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS YOU FACE IN THE HOSPITAL CONTEXT?

Fragmentation of work processes

Being working as a team to perform any of the health care service, most of the time is wasted in asking and conveying the other nurses or team mates like: *We need to talk to the people and convey our opinions, duties and task assigned to us. in this process majority of time is wasted in trying to inform others individually like: if my shift is over then i need to wait for other of my co nurse to come in night shift and i need to inform her that u need to take the further so and so treatment on the patient of a particular room no. Or name (A3).*

Work Shifts

Since nurses work round the clock, some in morning shifts while others in night shifts and these shifts keep on changing so, there is no direct contact among the team mates and communication is usually indirect. Message in this case is given by phone or via third person which could hinder the grasp of original message like: *We need to inform the doctor in the morning about the condition of the patient being attended by us in the night shift for that we need to wait for the time doctor don't comes in the morning even if our work hours are finished otherwise at times if we convey our message on phone that it is usually not understood or not taken seriously (A6).*

Resistance to Change

Nurses usually resist the change like: *If we want someone else new in our team or some new timetable of work schedule. This creates feeling of dissatisfaction towards the work and thus, they tend to neglect the communication and meetings and one has to run after other members to gather everyone and still no proper feedback comes. Thus, it is sheer a wastage of time (A12)*

Lack of Work Team Involvement

Sometimes health staffs do not show interest towards their job and task assigned due to some or other problems. Thus, in this case they tend to avoid the communication and there is tendency of depersonalisation towards the work and team members .Hence, it is quite demanding (A9) .

Work Overload

If there is high workload in the hospitals and employees feel stressed and burdened then the communication barriers always increase and it leads to poor service outcomes and staffs tends to deliberately disobey or ignore the instructions given like: *At times we ask our nurse to attend 5 to 6 patients at a time, in exceptional cases as due to shortage of nurses or poor attendance of nurses on a particular day then in that case subordinate nurses deliberately avoid the instruction and deliver poor service outcomes, it is highly frustrating and annoying at times(A1-Head Nurse).*

Poor Senior-subordinate Relationship

If there is poor interpersonal relationship between the seniors and subordinate nurses or poor doctor –nurse relationship it is then the major reason for poor communication like: *If doctors or our senior nurse do not emphasize with us and do not understands our problems and tries to fulfil our demands then we does not feel like communicating or*

informing them and thus, communication gaps widens (A14).

Fatigue and Boredom

The job fatigue and boredom cases of work environment also are the key obstacles of smooth internal communication. If one feels the job fatigue or boredom at workplace then he/she get demotivated and disinterested in listening, conveying or asking like: *Our continues placement at one department of hospital or long continues work hours, facing 3wdisease and deaths and depressive atmosphere without any change make us feel fatigue and disinterested in performing quality work. We feel tired and exhausted and these factors are the key drawbacks in efficient communication (A18).*

What is the Effect of Poor Communication on Work Efficiency and Morale of Nurses of Concerned Hospitals?

Poor communication outcomes gravely affect the working efficiency and quality service outcomes of the nurses. It aggrieves and demotivates them, consequently leading to increase of complaints and grievances' in the work environment as:

Due to communication gaps we are at times criticised and nagged by the authorities for any deficiencies in work or services. It makes us feel annoyed and frustrates us. As the fault lies in the communication system and not in our work performance (A7).

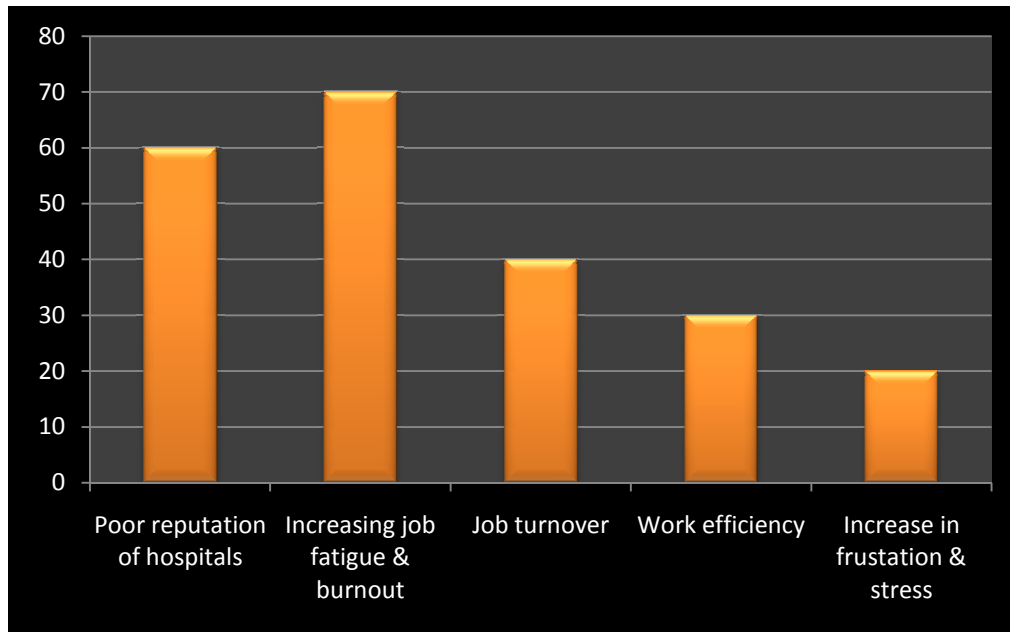
Poor communication makes us confused and much of time and energy is wasted in gathering information on knowing the task we need to do than actually, performing the task. Thus, it affects our work efficiency and service outcomes (A4, A13, A5).

Communication barriers resulting from poor senior subordinate relationship usually affects the quality outcome and if we are blamed for any of the negligence and mistakes even by at times the patients and their families. At times their is verbal confrontation with the patients. It leaves us shattered and we feels insulted .These incidences at times leads to leaving the job or increase in absenteeism rate as what has happened many times earlier (A20,A5,A16,A8).

Communication barriers due to fatigue and boredom leads to increase in errors and mistakes on the job, more of work place conflicts and thus, we deliberately shrink responsibilities at workplace (A13, A15, A4and A9,A7).

Frustrations occurring due to weak communication with the physicians or team members play a vital role in increase in stress and feeling of depersonalisation at the workplace (A9, A18, A2).

Weak communication system is a big challenge to our work efficiency also and effects the reputation of the hospitals and its market value (A11,A1,A20,A3,A6,A17)



Suggestions of hospital nurses to overcome the communication barriers?

Counselling

According to majority nurses counselling should be undertaken at all levels and senior and subordinates should meet together to discuss the impediments of healthy communication system of their organization so that things can come out in more open form and necessary corrective actions can be taken(A1,13,9).

Training

More of the training should be provided to the nurses to better improve their communication skills and how to make it clear, concise and timely. Moreover how to correct the underlying defects in communication system should also be imparted (A1, 5, 13, 19).

Workshops and Seminars

Mandatory workshops and seminars should be organized to make the nurse and even the senior management including our doctors and administrators to participate in it and to know the both sides of the communication benefits and defects of poor communication. Moreover, these workshops should also impart the knowledge that effective communication system functions only when we all contribute to it including our seniors too. It's like two wheels of a cycle (A1,8, 13,9,4).

Introduction of Latest Technologies

As most of us complaint of the message being not conveyed by the third person or message be conveyed or understood vaguely by the receiver or sender, moreover, the barriers of noise, time obstruct the effective communication .Thus, all these deficiencies can be overcome by installing proper technologies in the hospital and giving the training to every employee for its use as voice mails or E-mails .Thus, communication needs to be dignified by introducing even memos, slips, written notes etc(A2, 14,)

Healthy and Cordial Work Environment

A satisfied and energetic workforce is the key driving factor for the effective communication as: *If the management will care for our needs and problems and will be sensible towards us then we will also contribute our best to fulfil their goals and render quality outcomes. We will take and give the instructions and information's clearly, timely and precisely without deliberately avoiding them. (A12,6,20,7,11).*

DISCUSSIONS

From the information gathered from the sample of 20 nurses, who are having the good qualification and working experience, the facts that came in limelight are that the communication process is the two way exchange of the information and it's like two wings of a bird. Various factors that hinder the communication flow in the hospitals were like:

Firstly, Fragmentation of work process due to which majority time is wasted in delivering and gathering the information and thus, effecting the actual goal to be achieved. *Secondly*, Work shifts change also effects the communication outcomes as they face difficulty in delivering the accurate and timely information to the other person coming on the next shifts. Thus, less face to face interaction is there due to shift changes and communication is mostly indirect using slips, letters or via some third person which can at times hamper the actual grasp of original message. *Thirdly*, poor senior –subordinate relationship is the key factor for the weak communication as nurses due to poor interpersonalisation relationship usually work their own way and at times are subject to confrontation with the patients and even at times with the doctors. *Fourthly*, work overload is also one of the significant factor for poor communication as high workload forces one to deliberately shrink the responsibilities and avoid the required communication. *Fifthly*, the hierarchical structure of the hospitals place nurses on the lowest level of managerial hierarchy plays key role in poor communication, of upper mgt. thus, weakens the communication outcomes. *Lastly*, lack of team spirit in the functioning of the nurses also retards the smooth flow of the communication. There is less of coordination and cooperation in working of the nurses in groups'. Usually high conflicts and grievances are seen among the team mates. One wants to overpower other and tries to exercise their monopoly on various matters.

The ill effects of communication according to the nurses say that it retards their work efficiency and increase the cases of job absenteeism, negligence and even job turnover. Confrontation and violence incidences also increase among the patients and nurses and at times with the physicians. Hence, poor communication has the direct effect on poor productivity, patient dissatisfaction, poor morale, job burnout, feeling of depersonalisation, high financial and manpower wastages in the healthcare sector.

The suggestions given by the nurses should be valued and applied as they are the edifice of health care industry being on the job round the clock. The suggested measures for improving and inculcating the effective communication should be implemented timely and effectively so that workplace deficiencies can be eliminated to a large extent.

Suggested Measures for Incessant Communication

- Engage in active listening at all levels of the organization.
- Involve employees and other organization staff in decision making.
- Build organizational environment pleasant and lively.

- Inculcate collaboration for internal communication efforts among various departments of the organization.
- Integrate internal and external communication.
- Establish continues process for strengthening internal communication system.
- Make the message more clear and precise.
- Cordial senior subordinate relation so as to remove organization disinterest among employees.
- Feeling of sensitivities and empathy should be developed in the management

REFERENCES

1. Impact of Communication in Healthcare Sector, Institute for Healthcare Communication, (2011). www.healthcarecomm.org/about-us/impact-of-communication-in-healthcare/
2. Hopkins, L., (2006).What is Internal Communication. www.leehopkins.net/2006/07/06/what-is-internal-communication/
3. Shafipour, V., Mohammad, E., & Ahmedi, F. (2014) Barriers to Nurse-Patient Communication in Cardiac Surgery Wards: A Qualitative Study, *Global Journal of Health Science*; Volume 6 no.6.
4. Shafipour, V., Mohammad, E., & Ahmedi, F.(2014) Barriers to Nurse-Patient Communication in Cardiac Surgery Wards:A Qualitative Study, *Global Journal of Health Science*; Volume 6 no.6.
5. Shafipour, V., Mohammad, E., & Ahmedi, F.(2014)Barriers to Nurse-Patient Communication in Cardiac Surgery Wards: A Qualitative Study, *Global Journal of Health Science*; Volume 6 no.6.
6. Impact of Communication in Healthcare Sector (2011), *Institute for Healthcare Communication*.
7. Wagner, J.-D., Bezuidenhout, M.C. & Roos, J.H.(2014) Communication Satisfaction of Professional Nurses Working in Public Hospitals. *Journal of Nursing Management*.
8. Hodgekiss, A. (2013). www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article2306364/toddler-bleed-death-hospital-weekend-catastrophic-lack-communication-doctorshtml#ix2z3tu50kofh
9. Kempen, A., V. (2007). Legal Risk of Ineffective Communication. *Journal of Ethics* Volume 9 No. 8. www.ama-assn.org/2007/08/

