



DOCTOR - PATIENT COMMUNICATION ITS CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE PATIENT HEALTH: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Hospital Administration

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ABSTRACT

Communication plays vital role in people's life. People rely on communication to accomplish smallest of details in daily life to major happenings in life. Communication is a transfer of information from sender to receiver with information understood by receiver. Since communication is a medium to transfer one's thoughts to other person it is potential of putting a lot of impact on relationships. Talking about physician-patient relationship communication has a great role to play. Patient coming to physician needs to be communicating openly about the ailments and other health concerns also on other hand it is equally important for a physician to be available for patient and try to communicate with patient in best understandable way to patient. This review paper aims to understand the role of effective communication on making doctor-patient relation better leading to fast health recovery.

KEYWORDS

Health communication, doctor-patient relationship and health recovery.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the most important and powerful tool in establishing any base of relationship. By the help of communication we are able to express or receive an emotion of human being. Communications are usually of two type's verbal and non verbal communication. Verbal communications are kind of communications in which we use words as the medium to express ourselves however non verbal communications are of kind where there is no use of words but gestures like smiling, shrugging shoulders or simply tapping a back of an individual. Both verbal and non verbal communications has great role to play in establishing and maintaining relationships among individual. [1]

The relationship between the physician and the patient is established and maintain by the level of communication they share. Doctor's communication skills in the doctor-physician relationship develop a platform of trust behaviors. The doctor's communication behaviors in general are providing comfort and care to patient, competence, compassion and honesty towards patient. Physicians who fail to understand an importance of interactions between patients and physicians can result in poor patient treatment experience. Physicians who understand the importance of patient's feeling and emotions shall always use good communication skills to interact with the patient. Physician-patient Relationship includes verbal and non verbal communication, effective questioning and transmission of information, expressions of empathy and participatory decision-making. [2]

Communication contributes in better Understanding of patient's illness leading to benefits of treatment and risks involved in treatment. Doctor's ability to explanations, show compassion, participation of patient and decision-making have correlated with lower blood pressure, less patient anxiety, less organ damage among patients. [3]

Doctor-patient communications can influence health outcomes in many ways. For example, talk can be therapeutic and may help a patient experience an improved psychological well-being, lesser negative emotions (e.g. fear, anxiety) and more positive emotions (e.g. hope, optimism, and self-worth). [4]

Talk may affect physical symptoms as well. In one study, for example, empathic communication lowered physiological arousal and pain in patients with irritable bowel symptoms. Nonverbal behaviors, such as touch or tone of voice, may directly enhance well-being by lessening anxiety or providing comfort. [5]

IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION:

Communication is the central part of doctor-patient relationship. Communication is an art of medicine and a key component in delivering any health care facility to the patient for any kind of illness. Doctor-patient relationship resolves around the way of communication delivered by them to the patient from the very first point of contact. Communication acts as the primary essence of doctor's treatment aspects. [6]

Interpersonal-relationship, Exchange of information and Involvement of patients in decision making are three important aspects in any doctor patient communication, it helps in facilitating the good flow of information between doctor-patient enhancing better understandings between doctor and patient. [7]

Apart from clinical treatment being provided to the patients, some non clinical aspects also plays critical role. Doctor's manners and way of conduction of treatment has great impact on patient. Patient does not deeply have knowledge of treatment provided to them but a patient usually judge a doctor's competence on the basis of his behavior conduction of the treatment and health care delivery. [8]

While having a treatment different types of Patients have different types of expectation, needs and perceptions related to treatment process and doctor. An effective doctor-patient communication has potential to regulate patient's emotion level, facilitate clear medical information and allowing improved perception of patient towards treatment being provided. [9]

It has been observed by researchers that patients who are in good terms with their doctors are reported to be satisfied by the treatment being provided to them. A good communication between doctor and patient facilitates better information sharing which plays crucial role in early diagnosis of the treatment. Having good terms with doctors makes patient adhere to the treatment process for longer period of time. Patients also tend to follow all the instructed advices by the doctor and adhere to the prescribed treatment by the doctor. [10]

Some patients are independent in nature and takes interest in their health status. These types of patients are involved in treatment process with the doctor. The patients who are involved in their treatment process, discuss in details of their treatment like the nature of treatment, methods and follow up sessions have stronger chances of recovery. [11]

Communication enhances the psychological abilities of the patient resulting in better mental status. A good mental status helps in adjustment of environment around the patient. Studies have shown that a good mental status decreases the length of hospital stay of patient and the degree of hospital visits also decreases [12]

A treatment that is patient centric and resolves around the needs and requirements of patients are both beneficial for doctor and patient. A patient who is getting right treatment is more satisfied with the doctor resulting in building better doctor-patient relationship. A satisfied patient is less complaining to their doctor and also avoid any kind of formal complains if anything goes wrong by mistake. Patient-centered encounter results in better patient as well as doctor satisfaction. [13, 14]

In the cases like Cancer, the dealing with the patients becomes the more sensitive part of treatment. Cancer patients are not only struggling with their physical health issue but also mentally exhausted due to the

stigma attached with the Cancer. Studies have shown that Cancer patients are dependent upon their doctor to provide them emotional and decisional support to cope up better with society and other issues that comes along the process of cancer treatment. [15]

CHALLENGES IN COMMUNICATIONS:

Creating a good and effective communication between doctor and patient is not an easy task. There are lots of barriers in doctor-patient communication. A lot of time the patient's emotional level, cultural background, anxiety and unrealistic expectations works as barrier in doctor-patient communication. Studies have also shown that sometimes the work stress of doctor also works as barrier to an effective communication. [16]

It has been observed that communication is considered as a crucial determinant in any treatment. Doctor's empathetic behavior helps in establishing a relationship with patient. [17]

Patients have complained that doctors usually lacks in empathy and nonverbal communication. Doctor's behavior such as not paying attention to patient, lack of respect towards patients, favoritism to specific group of patient are the cause of patient anxiety and unsatisfied behavior. Patients expect that their doctors must listen to them to whatever they say and answer all the questions related to patient disease. Patients want to be understood by the doctor and also interact with them about the progress of health. [18]

Paper entitled "Trust and Communication in the Physician-Patient Relationship," suggest that a patient-centric approach and doctors confidence result in better health management leading to patients satisfaction. Choosing right treatment and providing appropriate information to a patient is crucial. [19]

A communication that leads to better health recovery has impact on patients satisfaction level. If a treatment is showing positive outcomes the chances of patients satisfaction increases. satisfied patient is likely to adhere to treatment and a good follow doctor's advice. A good communication enhances psychological health of patient and improve the over health of patient facilitating better prognosis and less hospital stay. [20]

There is a huge importance of doctor's communication in patient recovery. An evaluation of doctor's communication takes place through a survey. A survey of group of patients is done where patients are asked to submit the review of the communication delivered by doctor. External raters are also involved in the survey. All this helps in finding real analysis on doctor-patient relationship. The data helps in improving the health care delivery system. [21]

Strategies To Improve Communication:

However the traditional method of communication is not enough to build doctor patient relationship, Some techniques may be used to exchange information in doctor-patient relationship. A basic communication skill is insufficient to create a successful therapeutic doctor-patient relationship. A communication may involve an interaction where patient's feelings and emotion are involved in expecting better quality treatment [22]

While many technologies have emerged in the field of medical to improve patients health by medical diagnosis and treatment, interpersonal communication still plays the most crucial role in exchanging information among doctor-patient. Interpersonal relationship enhances open views sharing by patients to their doctors. [23]

The fundamental instrument in doctor-patient relationship a good inter- personal communication helping in for clear sharing of information. Any other technique works as assistance to the communication [24]

Communication has a vital role to play from the very beginning of the treatment. First impression of doctor plays crucial role in influencing patients emotional health hence doctor's communication style and doctor's behavior during consultation is as important as the information being conveyed to the patient. The importance of communication starts with first consultation [25]

The most important aspects of doctor-patient relationship are keeping a treatment patient centric. A patient centric approach is achieved by

doctor being a good listener includes developing a good relationship with patient [26].

Communication helps in improving not only one aspect but different aspects of health but it works on holistic health. Communication has a multi dimensional role to play in patient's health. An effective doctor-patient communication improves overall health of the patient by improving illness symptoms, building patient's trust and their overall satisfaction level. This will lead patient to adhere to the treatment and not leaving the treatment in between. [27-29]

A communication works as an strategy. A communication is a strategy to an open communication where doctor and patient can freely discuss about the treatment process. Lot of times a patient's desires and doctors style of treatment might not match therefore an open and efficient communication might ensure high-quality care to their patients. [30-32]

When ever an individual is ill and suffering through any condition he is looking for an emotional partnership. A patient is expecting a better clinical result but also seeking an emotional support from doctor. Patient expect more patient-centered approach with communication, partnership, and health education by the doctor. Patient wants to know a detailed view on their illness by the doctor [33]

Patient-centered care is drafted in a way where a doctor feels more responsible toward their patient's needs, desires and perceptions. Doctor is involved in decision making process of the treatment with the patient. This gives a sense of protectiveness to patient and patient is likely to seek more advises from the doctor. [34]

Doctor is involved with patient in all the decision making procession relate to patient illness/treatment this build and interpersonal relation where patient feels empowered and confident. Doctor being empathetic a showing compassion towards patient is key to build a better doctor patient relationship. [35]

The main objective of any doctor is to improve the patient's overall health.

A patient's overall health recovery is not only achieved by clinical treatment but it also needs a prevention, promotion and cure in complete. Health communication/education focus on patient's healing process by providing an open access to patient thoughts of sharing the views on treatment. Doctor's communication plays vital role in educating patient [36]

Studies on doctor-patient communication have demonstrated patient discontent even when many doctors considered the communication adequate or even excellent. Doctors tend to overestimate their abilities in communication. Studies have suggested that 75% of the orthopedic surgeons believed that the health education provided by them to their patients is satisfactory however only 21% of patients reported satisfactory communication. A survey has showed that Patient's are always expecting a more attention and communication by their doctor. Surveys have consistently shown that they want better communication with their doctors. [37-39]

In severe illness like cancers during 1950s to 1970s, Doctors believed that it is an inhumane practice to disclose bad news because of the tough treatment prospect for cancers. The fear and anxiety attached to cancer makes it little hard to accept for any patient [40]

In recent medical era a lot of importance is given to open communication. Doctor is practicing a communication model where doctor-patient can freely exchange the information and discuss openly about the treatment. This type of model is more patient centric and enhances better decision making by both doctor and patient. [41]

Better and effective communication builds an interpersonal relationship among doctor and patient which helps in detecting early problems which can save a lot of time and money of both patient and doctor also the health is prevented in prior. Such style of treatment by doctor where doctor is focusing on building healthy relationship with patient may lead to far better results than expected. A communication not only improves patient's physical health but also boosts patient's decision making quality and quality of life. [42-43]

Patients will more likely experience better health when they and

clinicians reach decisions that are based on the best clinical evidence, are consistent with patient values, are mutually agreed upon, and are feasible to implement. [44]

CONCLUSION:

Doctor-patient communication is a crucial element in process of health care delivery. Doctors can influence patients' health on larger aspect. A good doctor-patient relationship can improve a view of patient of how a patient looks at his own health which may influence their health results. An effective communication between doctor and patient can facilitate between health recover by increasing patient motivational and emotional level.

Most of the patients are concerned about doctors' attention towards their health more than just clinical treatment. Patient wish to get effective communication and not just clinical competency.

Doctors with better communication style and are able to maintain good relationship with patient. Patients who feel comfortable with doctors are able to share their problems which helps doctors to detect problems earlier and can prevent medical crises. All this leads to higher-quality health outcomes and better patient satisfaction. Doctor and patients can participate together in health recovery. Patient participating in health care decisions with doctors enhances better health quality and recovery.

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