

Role of Public Relation in Health Care Industry of Bhopal

¹Vijay Singh Rathore, ²Dr. Neha Mathur, ³Dr. Kaustubh Jain

¹Research Scholar (Management), ²Professor, ³Associate Professor
¹Faculty of Management, ²Faculty of Management, ³Faculty of Commerce
¹²³Rabindranath Tagore University, Bhopal (M.P.), India

Abstract: Public relation has become one of the most important aspect of any business today and when it comes to health services, the role of public relation becomes more crucial as these services are related to life, death and recovery of people. The aim of this study is to understand the role of PR communication in the health care industry taking Bhopal as the study area. The main objective is to find out the relationship between effective PR communication and satisfaction of the patient. A sample of 15 respondents from 10 multi-specialty hospitals of Bhopal is selected on the basis of judgment and interviews were conducted using structured questionnaire. A significant positive relationship was found between effective PR communication and satisfaction of the patients. It is suggested to the hospitals to maintain the quality of medical services. Proper training for the staff should be given to build the positive attitude, polite behaviour and helpful nature as these are the desired qualities by the patients. Satisfied customer (patient) will come back in future whenever they need medical services and thus building brand loyal customers. PR should portray these aspects of hospitals to build the reputation and brand image in the market.

Index Terms - Public relations, healthcare, PR communications, hospitals, Behaviour, Attitude.

I. INTRODUCTION

PR communications has become a very important aspects in all industries and business sectors. When it comes to health care industry, it is perceived as more important as health care is the prime importance for the peoples and is associated with their life. Theoretically, maintaining relations with public is termed as Public Relations (PR). This term was originated from U.S and get spread to all over the world. Effective communication is the key for successful PR communications. The image of doctors and health institutions in the public is not even close to what health professionals wanted. Various health institutions are shaken by the affairs associated with unethical practices, charging of more fees, corruption and bribes. People even think that Doctors are stereotype people, having high pride and arrogance and do not like to talk with other, do not possess good communication skills etc. For eliminating such dilemmas and improving the image of doctors and institution, management of health care organization recruits communication professionals. These professionals were called as PROs or Public Relation Officer. The job of such professional is to portray the image and efficiency of the institutions and doctors in such a manner to the people so that it will be perceived as the best place for treatment.

Today, all the health institutions were engaged in improving the efficiency of their public relations due to increased competition in the sector and selective behavior of the customer (Tengilimoglu, 2001). More and more health facilities and institutions were coming in the market with sophisticated technology and latest machinery leads to make the competition fierce within the sector. In addition, patients have become better informed and more accountable consumers of health care services and want to become more active participants in decisions regarding the treatment process (Akinci et al., 2004). This increased desire for consumer choice has forced hospital managers to look at service availability in a different way; thereby opening the door for more customer-oriented recruitment strategy. Increased emphasis in the area of public relations can help to bring consumer-friendly services to the forefront increasing agency marketability and consumer choice. The focus of marketing department is now to attract more pool of patients by identifying the desires and need of the people (Cutlip, 2003). The PRs has given the responsibility to promote a positive image and transfer of news, dealing with criticism and training of internal public for teamwork.

II. PUBLIC RELATION

Today, literature provides several definitions of Public Relations but the best way to describe it is by just understanding and defining the term itself. Different researchers and institutes has defined Public Relations in their own way but the essence and core of their definitions were found same as building long term relationship with the clients and stakeholders. *American Association for Public Affairs*, known by short PRSA in November 1982 said that public relations helps our complex, diverse society in decision-making and allow it to function efficiently, so that it contributes to the achievement of mutual understanding between the institution (organization) and their environment (target group). James Grunig and Todd Hunt in their article defined public relations as “managing communications between the organization and its public.” This at first glance is quite simple definition but perhaps best reflects the essence of public relations (Grunig and Hunt, 1984). Doctor Zoran Tomić defines public relations as the process of communicating with its internal organization and external public relations to achieve mutual understanding build social responsibility and achieve common interests (Tomić, 2008). From these definitions, it is evident that effective communication is the key to deal with the public and stakeholders. In fact, hundreds of definitions of PR even now

largely come down to communication, which is basically the essence of public relations. The entire process for attaining mutual understanding and realization of the common interest among the organization and its stakeholders is called as Public Relations.

If a more detailed insight is made into these and many other definitions of public relations, it is evident that relations with the public are dealing with communication. In fact, hundreds of definitions of PR even now largely come down to communication, which is basically the essence of public relations. Public relations are the process of communicating with its public organizations to achieve mutual understanding and realization of common interests. In line with this approach, we have a new, simple definition of public relations, which say: Public Relations are *communication* of organizations (hospitals) with its public. Using further on key words still can be decoded the word *public*. As for the public relations term general public is almost irrelevant, PR public should be divided into internal and external public. Statement about the importance of public understanding on the *internal* and *external* can reach to something concrete “help” of relations with public and healthcare.

III. PUBLIC RELATION IN HEALTH CARE

Health is considered as the most critical factor among the people and due to changes in the pattern of healthcare over a period of time, PR practices has also changed along with it. Like other industries, PR in healthcare has the same objective of building long-term relationship with the stakeholders and improving the brand image of the hospital (Traynowicz–Hetherington et al, 2001). Though they said that medicine is same industry as others but several researchers has opposed their statement commenting that this industry is associated with life, death and recovery of people and communication with patients and supplier of medicines and medicinal equipment’s. Improvement in health care industry is not only confined to cost-reduction as of other industries but also targeted to the wellbeing of the people and society by providing best quality of services to the patients. Therefore, employees of public relations who are responsible for promoting, improving and reversal of the overall system in the health industry must know subtly different motivation to get the motivation to care for the human being (Traynowicz–Hetherington et al, 2001).

The concept of Public Relation in health industry has gained momentum somewhere in 1950-60 and that time there was a very little need for creating awareness about the hospitals and facilities as these institutions had the support and sympathy of the people. The role of public relation is confined to spread information and positive image of the hospitals. Later by 1970, there was a shift in the working of PR in health sector and PRs were given new responsibilities due to emphasis on income generated by other health sources. Constant pressure forced hospital managers to seek professional public relations and communication professionals to maintain two-way communication between hospitals or health organizations and their public. The PRs has given the responsibility to promote a positive image and transfer of news, dealing with criticism and training of internal public for teamwork (Cutlip, 2003).

First jobs in the PR of health care were focused on strategy and tactics that supported the health organization. PR is considered something that is better to use than a long-term and uncertain process of building a loyal and satisfied patient. Communication principles that they describe and predict in health are long-term relationship which is equally important in the PR of health than in any other human relationships. Principles of reciprocity, equality, respect and belief take new meaning in the context of health care business relationships. With the patient in the middle, vendors and suppliers such as doctors, pharmaceutical companies, managing companies and third-person who is “paying compensation” are in a unique puzzle of public relations. Experts believe that one of the most important roles of PR is listening to patients, rather than transmitting the message. Proactive methods of promoting medical images, such as educational initiatives, are equal with the emphasis on prevention of health problems (Baines et al, 2004).

IV. AIM & HYPOTHESIS

So far, various studies has already been conducted on the importance and role of Public Relations with respect to different organizational setup and some of them were also based on Health care too. The aim of this study is to know the role of public relations in health care industry which can be specified as:

- (i) To examine the relationship between good public relations and patients’ satisfaction with the way they are attended in hospitals of Bhopal city
- (ii) To find out the relationship between good public relations and patient’s patronage retention in hospitals of Bhopal city.

For achieving the aim and objective of this research, following hypothesis were developed:

H01: There is no significant relationship between effective public relation practices and satisfaction of patients

H02: There is no significant relationship between effective public relation practices and patients’ patronage retention

V. METHODOLOGY ADOPTED

The aim of this research is to know the role of PR communication in health sector. 10 multi-specialty hospitals was selected by the researcher and a sample of 15 respondents were selected from each hospital using judgment sampling technique making the sample size of 150 respondents. As this study is targeted to know the role of PR communications and satisfaction of patients, care has been taken while selecting the sample respondents that they have come across through some PR activities so far by demonstrating them each such activities conducted by hospitals. Data has been collected through the designed questionnaire by taking personal interviews with the patients and their family members within the wards of the hospitals. It is assumed that all the

respondents are not related to each other in any manner and the opinions of one respondent cannot affect the opinions of any other respondent. Data collected through designed questionnaire is filled in SPSS 21.0 for checking reliability of the designed instrument which is found **0.881** at Cronbach Alpha.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

The demographic profile of the sampled respondents is presented in table 1. It was found that the sample is dominated by male respondents (at 68.4%) whereas only 31.4% were females. The group has the largest chunk of people between the age group of 41 to above 70 years (66%) showing that as age grows people will get depended on medical facilities, followed by age group of 31-40 years (15.3%) and till 30 years (11.2%). It was also found that majority of respondents were married (82%) and having education of Graduate level (51.4%) followed by Postgraduate or above level (28%), up to 12th by 12.6% and up to 10th by 8%. About 45.3% of the respondents were working people (salaried or self-employed), followed by Housewife at 28.6%, other profession (17.4%) and Students at 8.7%.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the respondents (n=150)

	Demographic	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	103	68.6%
	Female	47	31.4%
Age	Upto 20 Yr	4	2.6%
	21-30 Yr	13	8.6%
	31-40 Yr	23	15.3%
	41-50 yr	37	24.6%
	51-60 Yr	47	31.4%
	61-70 Yr	15	10%
	Above 70 Yr	11	7.3%
Marital Status	Married	123	82%
	Unmarried	27	18%
Education	Upto 10th	12	8%
	Upto 12th	19	12.6%
	Graduate	77	51.4%
	Post Graduate & Above	42	28%
Occupation	Salaried	39	26%
	Self-employment	29	19.3%
	Student	13	8.7%
	Housewife	43	28.6%
	Others	26	17.4%

Table 2: Correlation Effective PR communication and Patient Satisfaction

		Correlations							
		The hospital has the right personnel and facilities for professional medical	The doctors at the hospital are competent	The doctors at the hospital are caring	The nurses at the hospital are professional	The nurses at the hospital are friendly	The non-medical staff at the hospital are polite and helpful	You are satisfied with the way the doctors and nurses attend to you at the hospital	You are satisfied with the medical services you receive from the hospital
The hospital has the right personnel and facilities for professional medical service delivery	Pearson Correlation	1							
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	150							
The doctors at the hospital are competent	Pearson Correlation	.346**	1						
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	.000 150	150						
The doctors at the hospital are caring	Pearson Correlation	.512**	.432**	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	.000 150	.000 150	.000 150					
The nurses at the hospital are professional	Pearson Correlation	.296**	.288**	.277**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	.000 150	.000 150	.000 150	.000 150				
The nurses at the hospital are friendly	Pearson Correlation	.363**	.338**	.385**	.236**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	.000 150	.000 150	.000 150	.000 150	.000 150			
The non-medical staff at the hospital are polite and helpful	Pearson Correlation	.443**	.370**	.438**	.273**	.335**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	.000 150	.000 150	.000 150	.000 150	.000 150	.000 150		
You are satisfied with the way the doctors and nurses attend to you at the hospital	Pearson Correlation	.350**	.343**	.360**	.225**	.318**	.225**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	.000 150	.000 150	.000 150	.000 150	.000 150	.000 150	.000 150	
You are satisfied with the medical services you receive from the hospital	Pearson Correlation	.366**	.355**	.358**	.329**	.373**	.331**	.323**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	.000 150	.000 150	.000 150	.000 150	.000 150	.000 150	.000 150	.000 150

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Nature of relationship that exists among effective PR communication and satisfaction of the patient is present in the correlation Coefficient Matrix (table no. 2). It was found that all the variable items from the two variables have significant correlations with each other. The correlation coefficient of the two satisfaction items with the public relations items are as follows; (r = 0.350, 0.343, 0.360, 0.225, 0.318, 0.225) and (r = 0.366, 0.355, 0.358, 0.329, 0.373, 0.331) at 0.01 significant level. Since there are significant correlation coefficients among the variables within the acceptable region of 0.01 and 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis and it is established that there exists a significant positive relationship among effective PR communications and satisfaction of patients. The results are not too surprising as the multi-specialty hospitals of Bhopal city were rendering quality medical services to their patients. They executed this by acquiring state-of-the-art medical equipment coupled with the professionalism of both the doctors and nurses. The confidence exuded by the medical staff as a result, together with their empathetic patient’s care could engender nothing but patients’ satisfactions. In other words, effective public relations create customer satisfaction for organizations.

Table 3: Correlation among Effective PR Communication and Patients Patronage & Retention

Correlations

		Patients are always attended to promptly at the hospital	Patients problem are treated with professional dispatch	Patients problems are treated sympathetically	Cost consideration has not prevented patients from receiving good medical service at the hospital	The hospital environment is comfortable	You will always use the hospital when the need arises
Patients are always attended to promptly at the hospital	Pearson Correlation	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
	N	150					
Patients problem are treated with professional dispatch	Pearson Correlation	.393**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000					
	N	150	150				
Patients problems are treated sympathetically	Pearson Correlation	.305**	.131**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.009				
	N	150	150	150			
Cost consideration has not prevented patients from receiving good medical service at the hospital	Pearson Correlation	.115*	.220**	.187*	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.021	.000	.018			
	N	150	150	150	150		
The hospital environment is comfortable	Pearson Correlation	.436*	.339**	.237**	.119*	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.018		
	N	150	150	150	150	150	
You will always use the hospital when the need arises	Pearson Correlation	.314*	.440**	.454	.121*	.244**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.000	.016	.000	
	N	150	150	150	150	150	150

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Nature of relationship that exists among effective PR communication and patient’s patronage retention is present in the correlation Coefficient Matrix (table no. 3). The table shows that all the variable items from the two variables have significant correlations with each other. The correlation coefficient of the retention items with the public relations items are as follows; (r = 0.314, 0.440, 0.454, 0.244) at 0.01 significant level and (r = 0.121) at 0.05 significant level. Since there are significant correlation coefficients among the variables within the acceptable region of 0.01 and 0.05, hence null hypothesis is rejected stating that there exist a significant positive relationship among the effective PR communication and patient’s patronage retention.

The reason behind the patronage of patients is quality of medical services offered by the hospitals along with helpful, pleasant and good attitude and behaviour of staff (medical and non-medical) and comfortable environment of the hospital. The combination of these factors results in the satisfaction of the patients and builds a positive image and trust within them which will bring them back to the hospital in future whenever there is a need of medical services and hence succeeding in making brand loyal customers. Not only this, brand loyal and satisfied customers will bring more business to the organization through positive word of mouth publicity which is proven the most trustable form of promotions in Indian market scenario (Sharma & Sharma, 2015).

VII. CONCLUSION

The aim and objective of this study is to know the role of PR communications in health care industry and examine the relationship between effective PR communications and satisfaction of patients as well as patronage and retention. The research work has revealed that there is a significant and positive relationship exists among effective PR communication and satisfaction of the patients due to the quality of services provided at the hospitals of Bhopal city as well as attitude and behaviour of the staff, both medical and non-medical. It is therefore suggested that PR need to cater and develop the medical facilities desired by the patients. Only portraying the activities will not be sufficient for bringing more patients to the hospital or building the brand. It is essential to develop the best medical facilities, pleasant environment and trained staff who will behave in a polite way, helpful to the patients and shows calm and positive attitude. Development of these activities will make the patients satisfied with the services and effective PR communication regarding these features will bring more customers to the hospital and build the brand image in the market. Also word of mouth communication is proven as the strongest form of promotion in Indian scenario and when it comes to health services, people generally seek opinion from their known one. A satisfied customer will thus spread positive word of mouth publicity about the hospital and will bring more business to the hospital. It is also suggested to the hospitals to hire professional PRs for projecting proper and consistent desirable image for their hospitals.

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