

Internal communication in wards with high and low patient satisfaction

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Abstract

Introduction Good patient communication contributes to better health outcomes, greater patient satisfaction, shorter treatment times, fewer complaints and a more efficient resource use. Good communication between management and employees is conducive to lower absenteeism as well as greater employee satisfaction and commitment. These two realisations converge in a study of the relationship between the internal communication of hospital staff and patient satisfaction.

Methods A qualitative study of the communication culture in wards with high and low levels of patient satisfaction was carried out over an 18-week period, answering the question: *What characterizes the internal communication in wards with high and low patient satisfaction?* The methodology employed coupled qualitative research interviews with observational studies of managers and staff interacting with colleagues and patients. The results identified a need for further investigation in the field of hospital management communication, which was the issue of a similar qualitative study entitled: *Managements role in communication culture*.

Results Patients overhear a good deal of internal staff communication and have a clear sense of what the mood in the department is. As a result, internal communication must also be developed in order to enhance the patient experience and increase patient trust. A strong communication culture beneficial to both patients and employees comprises: 1) common guidelines for shared communication; 2) articulated communication; 3) meta-communication; and 4) feedback. The management is responsible for the communication culture. The studies show how management

communicates in a ward with high patient and employee satisfaction, and what goes wrong when management communicates poorly.

Discussion/implications Solely examining the quality of individual patient conversations is not enough to achieve the human and financial benefits of good patient communication. This presentation discusses what comprises a strong communication culture and how it can be strengthened for the benefit of both patients and staff.