

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION BETWEEN DOCTORS AND PATIENTS

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Communication is the key factor necessary to improve the relation between doctors and patients. The communication is the method used to transmit or collect information using different types of channels. The communication process should provide useful information for doctors and patients. In order to establish a good communication system, both parts must fulfil some obligations. The present paper presents direct communication methods and indirect methods of communication.

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Richard Weiner⁸⁵⁵ defines communication as “transmitting or exchanging information, signals, messages or data using different ways – verbal communication, written communication, or by telephone, radio or other channels, within a group or orientated to specific people or specific groups.” Communication is a process which involves the existence of two parts: the sender – the person who initializes the communication and the receiver - the person who receives the message. Between these two parts of the communication system we find the message, the channel, the codification, the decodification and the feedback.

The communication between doctors and patients must fulfil the following:

- doctors must establish a relationship based on trust;
- doctors must continuously provide information about the correct methods that can be accessed by the population in order to benefit from correct health care services;
- doctors must know and apply the rights and obligations provided by the status of the insured person;
- to inform the patient about the risks that the incorrect dosage of a treatment may involve;

The communication between doctors and patients has the following roles:

- exchanging of information;
- creating the bases of a relationship;
- building a relationship based on trust;
- maintaining the relationship for a long time period;

In order to establish a good communication system between doctors and patients, both parts must fulfil some obligations:

The doctor’s obligations:

- the doctors must concentrate their full attention on the patients;
- confidentiality must be respected;
- permanent preoccupation with the patients;
- the doctors must treat their patients with respect;

⁸⁵⁵ Weiner, R., „Webster’s new world dictionary of media and communications”, Editura Simon & Schuster Inc., New York,1990, p.104.

The patient's obligations:

- the patients must establish a list of questions that they want to address to the doctors;
- when needed, the patients can assign a family member or a trustworthy person to; represent them in the discussions with the doctors;
- to keep an open dialog with the doctor;

Methods of communication

Direct communication – implies a direct dialog between two or more persons.

Types of direct communication:

1. Face to face communication occurs when the patient and the doctor are present in the same location, at the same time. This type of communication must be differentiated taking into account the different segments of patients. Taking into consideration the segmentation criteria based on the age of the patients we can identify the following:

- Children age between 3-10 years – must be considered as being the target segment to develop a good communication process. The health education must be presented as a story avoiding specialized terms and the results should be concluded with the help of a contest. For example, every child should have a table with daily hygiene rules in which he must mark with an X the respected tasks. Every week the doctors should check the accomplishment of those tasks.
- Children age between 10-14 years – the school doctor should organize and participate in open discussion in order to inform the children about the factors that causes the appearance of diseases and methods of prevention. When we talk about an epidemic, beside the explanation about the disease the doctor should display the methods of prevention of the disease in every classroom. The doctors should also initialize a contest in which to challenge the children to create prints about the disease and methods of prevention. The school doctor will select the most representative prints and will organize an exhibition in public places.
- Teenagers age between 15-19 years – the doctors should organize open discussions and project movies that explain the disease and also present the effects over the human body. When we talk about an epidemic the doctor could organize a forum of discussion on the web page of the high school, should transmit daily information about preventing the disease on the high school radio and should involve the teenagers in information campaigns about the epidemic among their young colleagues.
- Young population age between 20-35 years – the doctors should organize seminars on different themes in order to make them realize the risks of living a non-healthy life. For example, the school doctor should organize a seminary on the risks of consuming different types of drugs, alcohol and tobacco. Moreover, the doctors should create different accounts on socialization networks such as Facebook, Hi5 in order to communicate more easily with this segment of population. The doctors should additionally use e-mail communication in order to establish a meeting with the patients.
- Mature population and elderly population – the doctors should inform them about various modalities that they can use to reinforce their immune system, new methods of investigation and treatments discovered for each disease.

2. Communication by phone can be used for all types of patients and can occur when the doctor telephones the patient. This type of communication can be done in order to inform the patient about changes in the schedules. It can also appear when the doctor receives the blood results of a patient. When those indicate the appearance of a disease that requires immediate treatment or seeing a specialized doctor. In the case of communicating an incurable disease the doctor should contact a family member assigned by the patient to inform him about the disease and the proper method of informing the patient. For the segments between age 18-55, the doctor can modify the issues previously announced using the SMS service.

3. Communicating by mail can be used to inform the patients between 18-55 and can occur when the doctor announces the vaccination campaigns for babies, young children and the rest of population for

the prevention of new diseases. The doctors can send e-mails to patients in order to inform them about the opening of new medical clinics and services offered by those.

4. Communicating on an Internet forum. This type of communication can occur when the doctor creates a blog or an Internet page where the patients can address their questions. It is indicated for the doctor to have a schedule in which he will present the time and dates when he will be available for on-line communication.

Indirect communication is characterized by the possibility to send messages without a personal contact. The main forms of indirect communications are: printed media – newspapers, magazines; the broadcasting media – radio, television.

1. Communication using newspapers can be used when the doctors announce the vaccine campaigns for the patients. When a new disease appears, the newspaper can be used to inform the patients about the symptoms, effects over the human body and also about the methods of preventing it. The newspaper can even be used to inform the patients about the increasing of number of patients that have a contagious disease and the measures that must be taken. In the case of natural disasters that can influence the health status of the patients the doctors must communicate the measures that need to be taken into account.

2. Communication using specialized magazines in order to inform the patients about new discoveries in medical treatments and medical equipments.

3. Communication using radio and television as methods of sending the messages. The doctors must send messages in case of an epidemic explaining people the causes and effects of that epidemic and also the indicated medical measures that need to be taken into consideration. The doctors can participate in live transmissions on the radio or television where they can discuss current health issues.

Recommendations:

The health ministry must create a web page with the most competent specialized doctors for each medical domain. This page can be accessed by all patients from all over Romania. The site must provide a chat section and a forum where the patients can send analyses, X-rays, MRI analyses and treatments they themselves used in the process of treating a disease in order for the specialized doctors to get another confirmation about the diagnosis and the treatment. Also by using this site they must be able to obtain a medical appointment. This way, every patient will benefit from access to specialized doctors from every part of Romania.

The patients must be informed daily using the printed media and radio about the pharmacies that have the funds for compensated prescriptions.

The results of medical analyses and medical investigations must be delivered directly to the GPs (General Practitioners).

The patients must have the possibility to schedule to state clinics using the Internet site from where they can obtain the number of order.

If a person is medically insured and because of a lack of funds he/she has to pay for a medical analysis, he/she should benefit from a deduction to the sum paid for the medical insurance or the amount of money paid for that analysis must be returned to him.

Information campaigns about health issues conducted in schools should be conducted directly not by using only printed posters.

The communication campaigns using the Internet should increase the usage of Internet banners and interactive windows on the most accessed web sites.

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