

THE IMPORTANCE AND ROLE OF HEALTH WORKERS IN THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PUBLIC IN THE FUNCTION OF RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT ONCOLOGICAL DISEASES

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Public relations represent a management function and should establish mutual quality relations between the health institution and the public, on which the success of the organization depends. Public relation is a complex communication process, which includes the activities of a healthcare organization, aimed at developing cooperation with target groups, which can be internal and external. Good communication contributes to doctors and medical staff maintaining their professionalism at a high level, while following the principles of medical ethics, which greatly improves the quality of life of oncology patients. Communication is a key element of the patient's trust in the medical staff, and it plays a vital role in the treatment of oncology patients.

Dialogue through which support is provided is an extremely valuable resource and can be the most important (sometimes the only) element of patient care. The basic idea of an effective therapeutic dialogue is that the patient should get the impression that someone has heard and understood his fears and worries, in which the nurse's role is essential because she spends most of her time with the patient. It may happen that some of the problems can be solved, that some emotional moments can be overcome or that some needs can be satisfied, but even when there is no solution, the simple act of dialogue will reduce the patient's discomfort. *Acta Medica Medianae 2023;62(2): 71-76.*

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With real and honest communication, sympathy is gained, as well as trust, and a relationship of mutual understanding and acceptance is established. In this way, communication with the target public acquires and becomes an essential element of identity.

The reputation of an organization depends on how well it is known to the public and to what extent the public supports its goals. That is why the management of organizations increasingly relies on public relations experts. The job of an expert (PR manager) is to represent the organization, maintain good relations with the public and raise the effects and image of the company.

Introduction

In modern working conditions, an organization (company, client) is surrounded by a large number of service users and has a large number of public opinions with whom it needs to build contacts and communication. Employees in the public relations sector should therefore identify the target group and the public and build long-term relationships of mutual understanding and respect.

Public relations in healthcare

Public relations are indispensable for the functioning of a health institution. That is why the role of the PR manager in these institutions is indispensable, in internal and external communication, organizing events, presentations, creating the institution's image.

Since healthcare is a discipline to which the population is very sensitive and where quick and

accurate information is needed, it is clear that public relations are of extreme importance.

Public relations are conscious, planned and constant efforts to achieve and maintain good relations and mutual understanding between the work organization and the public. The practice of public relations is a social activity that deals with the analysis of trends and developments, predicting their possible consequences, advising the management of the organization and implementing planned programs of activities that serve the interests of both the organization and society.

Every work organization, including health-care, must clearly set public relations goals and each goal requires a separate strategy. If we want the goals set in communication projects to be measurable, certain conditions must be met:

- Clearly define the target group
- Determine the nature of the desired change
- Have a clear attitude about what we want to achieve
- Determine the scope and size of the changes
- Determine the time by which we want the change to happen

The public as an area of free communication includes all individuals or groups of people with whom an organization communicates or wants to communicate. For the development of an efficient health system, communication is crucial, because it is an integral part of the health service.

Modern operations of health institutions cannot be imagined without communication with the environment. Through communication, the institution informs the public about its services, possibilities for meeting the needs of patients, and in this way creates a positive image of itself. Public relations must be aimed at creating and building trust between the public and the healthcare institution.

The role of public relations in healthcare

The health system is one of the most important and complex systems of a society so the role of management is extremely responsible and demanding. PR therefore has the role of creating a climate suitable for the work of both patients and employees and achieving good results in the business of a certain health institution.

"Advertisers have the task of selling the audience a performance about itself, with the advertiser's product being integrated into that performance. The task of the media is to skillfully sneak into the general social life... in which they achieve significant success" (1). Therefore, PR needs to know the media well, all their possibilities, and find the best way to present their company and what it offers in them in order to reach their users in the best way.

"When we study content, we study, in fact, the way in which ideas and images are expressed and represented. This phenomenon is sometimes called encoding, or the production of symbols and symbol systems... The study of representation and the representation of human affairs is actually the study of grounded non-deterministic systems. There are a certain number of ways to represent an object, event, or action - one can always make a different original sketch - but each of these ways is grounded in the goal of focusing on what is represented, the person/or medium performing the representation, and the audience to whom the representation is intended" (2).

A good PR must know the market and the advertising system well. Advertising is "embedded in the very foundation of commercial mass media, because it enables the production and distribution of information and entertainment for a wide range of population, at a very low cost per consumer... In commerce, advertising is increasingly becoming a means by which manufacturers launch their products and maintain sales levels. The advertiser creates a need, and then convinces us that the product fulfills that need. Advertising, too, bypasses the product's effect by bragging about, enough to make it itself a reality" (3).

The attitude towards users has also been significantly changed, so it is moving from the consumer mass to target groups. The population is divided into meaningful units, so messages are created for those segments - target groups, by which we are attracted. "This means that analyzing with which value group a person identifies with, we can predict to a considerable extent which products and services he wants" (4).

The main reason why organizations engage in advertising is to better sell their special brand, e.g. some health institutions deal with advertising in order to increase the proportion of people who use the services of a particular health institution.

Thus, PR should achieve cooperation with the public, research the attitudes and needs of a certain target group, organize public appearances, plan and order advertisements, organize communication with the environment. Healthcare institutions themselves are under increasing pressure and public expectations.

That is why PR has the responsible task of developing and strengthening general understanding, trust and sympathy towards the organization, influencing public opinion in the interest of the organization, understanding and cooperation of all interested parties within the framework of a common goal, supporting general interests.

The PR is expected to select information based on relevance, communicators (transmitters of information) and translation of the language of the profession into a language understandable to every individual. Another important role of PR in the health sector relates to the education of citizens on a wide range of important health

topics, starting from topics related to legal health regulations, to the consequences and effects of health behaviors and habits, including symptoms of mass health problems. Their effectiveness depends on whether they know how to market it in the right way, at the right time and in the right place.

Public and oncologic diseases

Every year in Serbia, about 36,000 people get sick from cancer, and more than 20,000 lives are lost. One child falls ill in our country every day from one of the malignant diseases. Compared to others, Serbian citizens die from this disease in greater numbers due to, as doctors say, bad lifestyle habits, failure to attend regular preventive examinations, but also the lack of appropriate therapy and treatment.

In Serbia, fewer people get cancer than in some other countries, but the mortality rate is much higher. Guided by these statistics, it seems we are wrong in many things, and we must urgently react and correct it. The level of awareness about the prevention of malignant diseases (both among citizens and among medical personnel) must be at a much higher level. We need to correct life habits, raise to a higher level prevention as well as the knowledge of our doctors. In that way, we would come up with some new drugs and treatment techniques.

Pr activities in the role of helping oncologic patients

PR activities in the role of helping oncological patients can, and should, be of great importance, impact and help to people suffering from oncological diseases.

One of the good ways is to organize forums, in the spirit of multidisciplinarity, where all modalities of modern oncological treatment would be represented, with the patient at the center of every consultative decision and therapeutic plan. The focus is on the importance of specialized oncology centers, the adequate diagnosis, treatment and follow-up of oncology patients, all with the aim of achieving a better treatment outcome.

In the framework of carefully selected sessions, the novelties would be introduced to the public in the treatment of primary and metastatic cancer, the specifics of personalized radiotherapy and the current problems of medical oncology.

It is advisable to hire experts for these diagnosis needs to present contemporary views on, treatment and follow-up of oncology patients, with special reference to indications, radiological and therapeutic treatment protocols.

In addition to such forums, PR activities in the role of helping oncology patients can also include symposiums for nurses and technicians of oncology institutes, as well as organizing forums for oncology patients.

Communication with oncologic patients

Good communication is a key element of the patient's trust in the medical staff, and plays a major role in the treatment of oncology patients. Communication is an important but neglected factor that affects the quality of treatment in oncology. Poor communication is a result of inadequate training of the medical staff for the conversation who is often too sensitive and emotional, as well as the environment in which the conversation takes place.

The fundamental principles of effective communication with oncology patients are based on an approach in which the patient is the center of attention, which implies respect for the wishes and needs of patients and their families. Such communication has three basic values: it takes into consideration the patient's needs, perspectives and individual experiences, gives him the opportunity to participate in the treatment, and finally improves the relationship between the patient and the medical staff.

Communication where the patient is the center of attention is characterized by verbal and non-verbal behavior that should lead to the discovery, understanding and evaluation of the patient's perspective (e.g., concerns, feelings, expectations).

At the Institute of Oncology and Radiology of Serbia, the Serbian Association for Psycho-Oncology "SAPO" was founded (similar to associations in the region and in developed countries of the EU and the world), with the aim of providing psychological support, as a good form of communication, to people of different ages, patients with malignant diseases, as well as family members of patients, during all phases of demanding oncological treatment.

Information and communication Messages

It is often found in the literature that the term communication is associated with the term "information". The concept of communication is very closely related to the concept of information; therefore, some theorists point out the fact that information is the core of communication.

The term information originates from the Latin language and it means to form, to educate, that is, to present something. The word information etimologically refers to a number of key terms used in everyday language. In everyday speech, the term information is used much more often in the sense of the content of communication than in the original meaning as a term denoting the process of forming thought content (5).

The basic difference between communication and information can also be understood as the difference between communicative and informative activities. Communicative practice implies the creation and establishment of symbolic activity

as a concrete social relationship, while information can be understood as the content of communication or the subject of a message. (6)

In other words, communicative practice as a form of social relationship represents a social fact that dimensions but also limits the use value of any information. It can be pointed out that if information is understood as new knowledge than the message is actually shaped information.

In practical life, the term "information" has a very widespread use. It can function both by itself and as a substitute for other idioms such as data, news, notification. In the professional literature, there are over a hundred definitions of information, but not one of these definitions is universally accepted. With the help of information, we know everything that was available and understandable about the universe in which we live. Based on information, one tries to interpret what is factual from the past or to construct something and predict the future. However, information is not defined by the number of sounds, letters or electronic bits by which a slice of the universe is "measured" and mentally "accepted" (7).

In the world of men, signs and symbols, it is difficult to discover rules (if they exist), and there is even less lawfulness. Based on the use of signs and symbols, man tends to master both natural and spiritual processes and phenomena. It is best for man to establish what the information means. Only then will he decide whether he will react to her. It seems undeniable that human information must satisfy two more criteria: the criterion of utility and the criterion of probability (8).

Approach to the family of oncological patients

Psychosocial support is very important in the process of adaptation and further treatment of patients. The disease inevitably brings changes in lifestyle and goals, which directly affects the patient's family. When informing an adult about his illness and treatment, in most cases a member of the family or close environment is also present. In the case of minors, full information is given to parents or guardians, who at the same time give their consent to treatment. When we talk about persons deprived of business capacity, the information is given to their guardian. With the patient's permission, we talk to the closest family members. This is important for psychological support and the necessary care that must be provided at home between treatment cycles or in the terminal phase of the disease. It is usually said that the disease engages the whole family, but in some situations, it deepens misunderstandings and difficulties that existed before. It is important to overcome the stressful situation as soon as possible and to maintain communication in order to achieve a new balance that respects the new opportunities. The patient and family members

should be offered professional psychological help and support (9)

A place that ensures privacy should be provided for the conversation. The prognosis should be discussed in a way that the patient understands avoiding too many medical details. During the interview, the patient and his family should be allowed to express their emotions. The patient should be informed about events in the family, work, events that are discussed in society.

Such communication will mean that the patient is not oriented only to thoughts about the disease, which means that the disease has not disabled him and excluded him from everyday life.

When talking with patients who are in the terminal phase of the disease, one should examine how much the patient and his family know about the disease and the outcome, what the patient's attitudes are and his possible reactions, reexamine one's own feelings, attitudes, compassion and regret.

The obligation of the medical staff is to inform the patient about the results of the analysis, diagnosis of malignant disease and treatment, which is the ethical obligation of the doctor, and he will assess how much information the patient can "mentally bear".

Informed consent implies the doctor's obligation to inform the patient about the method of treatment, whereby the patient is left with the freedom of choice and self-determination. The patient has the right to consult another doctor, he has the right to another professional opinion (10).

In the conversation with the patient, one should be active with expressed empathy, sensitivity, objectivity, flexibility and relative absence of serious emotional problems. The patient should be presented with the problems and the possibilities of solving them, check if he understood what was said, repeat it in a way that he can understand. After the hospital part of the treatment is completed, it is necessary to agree on the patient's controls and propose a specific plan for the future (individually created, with the recommendation of inclusion in a psychological-oncology counseling center, physical rehabilitation).

In addition to the method of treatment (chemotherapy, surgical treatment, types of cytostatic, radiotherapy), the patient should be informed about the immediate side effects of the treatment (nausea, alopecia, loss of appetite, vomiting) and the possible solution (nausea - antiemetics, alopecia - wig), and to be informed about the late possible side effects of the treatment (e.g. sterility) (11).

Obstacles to good communication with oncological patients

What is happening in practice is, unfortunately, the so-called three-minute medicine, which means that the lack of time to talk is the main reason for the lack of information and the

justification for inadequate communication, because most health workers have to work with a large number of patients. However, if time is spent on effective communication, time can be saved later, because the patient feels that you really hear and understand him, so a mutual understanding of the patient's situation is achieved, which makes the relationship of compassion more effective (12).

An obstacle to good communication can be the patient's inability to express feelings, the shame of admitting that they have a problem with overcoming their own situation, or if the professionals seem too busy to them. The problem can arise if health workers do not feel confident or believe that emotional support is not part of their professional role and that the patient's emotional response does not affect them personally.

The tendency to use behavior that blocks approach and avoids talking about difficult emotional topics is well known in professional literature. It is very important to remember that both healthcare professionals and patients can use avoidance tactics. However, we must emphasize that it is very important to avoid behavior that blocks communication, such as giving too much comfort without identifying the underlying problem. It is necessary to avoid downplaying mental pain as something normal, focusing exclusively on physical aspects, changing the subject or incidentally cheering up the patient (13).

Conclusion

People can be strongly affected by the way we communicate with them, whether it is verbal or

non-verbal communication. The first contact and the way we start communicating with the interlocutor can be of crucial importance. It is very important, both with a healthy interlocutor in everyday life, and with a health care user with an existing or potential problem, how the first communication contact will be established, which can also have a "halo" effect.

Medical staff, PR managers, information services, in addition to technical skills, must also possess good communication skills, because in their work they constantly establish different relationships with the public, sick and patients, families, other health workers and organizations, and thus act indirectly between them.

The relationship that is established with a sick person is especially important, which can influence the development of the disease itself. That is why the old saying: "Disease licks the body and bites the personality", indicates the beneficial relationship of the healthcare worker towards the user of healthcare services. Words addressed to a sick person should not stamp the personality of the patient.

Often, the stereotypical medical "vocabulary" makes the patient and his personality completely equate with the disease, and the patient is often referred to as a "case". In any case, the patient is also a human being, and the language we use to address him must reflect respect and preserve his dignity. In every form of communication, we face a real challenge. We need to show sincere respect to the interlocutor, in order to help him express his feelings freely and openly.

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ZNAČAJ I ULOGA ZDRAVSTVENIH RADNIKA U ODNOSU SA JAVNOŠĆU U FUNKCIJI PODIZANJA SVESTI O ONKOLOŠKIM BOLESTIMA

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Odnosi sa javnošću predstavljaju funkciju upravljanja i treba da uspostavljaju međusobno kvalitetne odnose između zdravstvene ustanove i javnosti, od čega zavisi i uspeh organizacije. Odnosi sa javnošću su složen komunikacijski proces, koji obuhvata aktivnosti zdravstvene organizacije usmerene na razvijanje saradnje sa ciljnim grupama, internim i eksternim. Dobra komunikacija doprinosi tome da lekari i medicinsko osoblje drže svoju profesionalnost na visokom nivou, uz pridržavanje principa medicinske etike, što u velikoj meri poboljšava kvalitet života onkoloških bolesnika. Komunikacija je ključan element poverenja bolesnika u medicinsko osoblje i igra veliku ulogu u lečenju onkoloških bolesnika.

Dijalog kroz koji se pruža podrška je izuzetno vredan resurs i može biti najvažniji (nekada jedini) element zbrinjavanja bolesnika. Osnovna ideja delotvornog terapijskog dijaloga je da bolesnik treba da stekne utisak da je neko čuo i razumeo njegove strahove i brige; u tome je uloga medicinskih sestara velika, jer provode sa obolelima verovatno najviše vremena. Može se desiti da su neki od problema rešivi, da je neke emotivne momente moguće prevazići ili da je neke potrebe moguće zadovoljiti, ali, čak i onda kada nema rešenja, jednostavan čin dijaloga umanjuje nelagodnost bolesnika. *Acta Medica Medianae 2023;62(2):71-76.*

Ključne reči: odnosi sa javnošću, komunikacija, onkološke bolesti

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