

***ORIGINAL ARTICLE***

**EMPOWERING PATIENT'S RELATIVES: HOW TO DO IT RIGHT USING THE MEDIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

**Introduction:** Relatives play an important role in patient care - not only providing social support but also help to complement the existing care. They must be empowered with relevant knowledge and skills of patient care including motivating patient towards immediate healing and acceptance of his fate. Although these are various approaches, the media is regarded as the most effective method in educating the family or the relatives. This paper highlights the significant role of the media as an educational tool to mobilize patient's relatives in total patient care.

**Methodology:** This is a review conducted on reports, observations and feedbacks gathered from various sources involved in patient education in hospital setting. It was endorsed by a series of in-depth expert forum under patient education module.

**Results:** Relative empowerment has been identified to be as an important role and yet it is not fully utilized. The manpower resources are so scarce and crucial in patient as well as relative education. The media is the only alternative educational tool that could compliment the educational needs. Of all potential media available in the market we have recognized at least four types of media that can be optimally resourced and used. Through manipulation of its content and making it interactive, the role of media seemed to be extremely effective in patient management that include relatives.

**Conclusion:** The role of media in relative's education in support of patient care is undeniable. The media with the most potential should be identified and the management of its content to be enhanced. It must be incorporated with an interactive approach in order to have more self-involvement and understanding of its content.

**Keywords:** Relative empowerment, patient education, media, health communication.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Family and relatives play a substantial role in patient care; not only providing social support but their presence also provides an important source of psychological stability. They are also important in complementing the activities of the existing care team<sup>1</sup>. Patient is encouraged to participate and response more effectively to the therapeutic regime that is being prescribed.

The manner of support depends strongly on the belief and perception of relatives towards certain diseases. Relatives who believe that the illness is the responsibility of the patients would interfere with the healing process. If relatives do not understand the condition suffered by the patient, they tend to pay less attention in patient care and management. As a consequence patient management would be compromised<sup>2</sup>.

Relatives by definition are people who have an intimate relation with the patient. They could be the spouse, the parents, the children, in-laws or someone who is given the responsibility to take care of the patient. Their role is vital because it would facilitate the task that is usually provided by the medical staff. With continuous care and observation, it would not only minimize the contact between staff and patient, but more importantly it would help to motivate patient towards immediate healing and acceptance of his fate<sup>3</sup>. Only those who are well empowered could effectively deliver the meaningful social support and caring.

There are many ways and approaches to empower patient's relatives. It could be direct through verbal action, or indirect via the media. However in this article, the discussion is mainly focused on the use of media as a medium to enhance specific knowledge and skills in patient care by utilizing the relatives.

## **WHY MEDIA?**

Formal media, be it printed or electronic, is a known and trusted communication instrument that can facilitate long lasting medical and other educational understanding<sup>4</sup>. However, its content has always been limited to patient's perspective only. There are not many media approaches that have been purposely developed to educate and empower relatives toward patient care<sup>5</sup>.

Choosing the correct media to convey certain message is important because it would

ensure a convenient and effective facilitation<sup>6</sup>. The educational and empowerment information that is going to be incorporated in any media should be able to be translated by the relatives, in order to support the general care provided by the existing management. However, caution must be exercised, so that the concept of education should be exclusively on patient management and not the general information about the disease. In other words, the information should be not on diabetes information, but more importantly, on how to look after patients with diabetic problem.

Since media is a very powerful tool and easily accessed to bring about changes, it is timely to use this approach in order to optimize relatives toward a more meaningful care. This option undoubtedly must be seen as a most important strategy in patient education and patient care as it would increase the quality of the existing management.

## **THE POTENTIAL MEDIA**

The various types of media evolve in line with the digital era and information boom. It ranges from as simple as pamphlets to interactive web-based programs. It is all about accessibility of information regardless the location of the patient, whether they are in the ward or at home. It is also regarding the close relationship between patients and their care givers.

In providing information on patient care, both type's media and content are equally important particularly in cases where the role of relatives are highly needed. Certain crucial information such as the objectives of diagnostic procedures and treatment, patient progress and its natural pathways, the healing mechanism and its general awareness are all very relevant as these will ascertain an in-depth insight about the problems experienced by the patients.

The following types of media are some of the potential type that is deemed capable to empower relatives towards a holistic patient care, and how it could be utilized to optimize its functions.

### **1. Video and Video Session**

Teaching and education using social media particularly video has been universally used in the medical field<sup>7</sup>. It is equally good both in medical training of the medical staff and medical education to the patient. It can be

conducted openly in the class room or indirectly via on-line or web-based. The later seemed to be quite popular and lots of educational video clips could be easily viewed from thousands of sites. Some are very effective and are fully utilized. Site like *www.doc.com* for instance is very popular in the medical training of medical students. Its concept has been aggressively replicated by many educational activities and the responses are overwhelming. However caution need to be applied as this kind of technology is not comparable to the conventional teaching of face to face approach<sup>8</sup>.

A similar approach can also be applied for the relatives. The role of video and video session is one of the best methods of channelling empowering message to them. It can be done in the wards, in the lobby using kiosk or in special rooms within the hospital. Its content could be tailored to the specific needs of the relatives via an interactive mode. It provides information regarding admission requirements, the do and the don'ts in the ward, the common problems patient would face in the ward and how to handle it right, rational of diagnostic procedures or even the medications.

The content of the video should be well tailored to the individual circumstances. This can be coupled with video presentations of patients' relative 'role models', who faces a similar situation, so that it will enhance their appreciation on the importance of support and care for a better patient management. Many studies have shown that interactive video in medicine is the best educational technology in patients care<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, video sessions will improve the knowledge of the relatives and thus would help them in taking care of the patients.

## **2. Short Messages Services (SMS)**

Mobile phone is another useful media technology that can be utilized for better patient management. With its higher usage and coverage, mobile phone can be the most practical media to channel instant message or SMS to both patients and their relatives<sup>10</sup>. A mutual collaboration between hospital and telecommunication companies are needed to ensure this educational intervention can be successful.

The reminder system should be set up so that the relatives are constantly updated with the task that they are required to follow. The

phone number must be registered and the particulars of the patients under his/her care can be categorised into specific diseases.

Using SMS as a method of patients and relatives empowerment is not new. It has been used extensively in the developed countries. It has been identified as the best tool to support patient empowerment actions. Apart from giving information to the relatives, it is also used to establish a good relationship and partnership<sup>11</sup>.

## **3. Educational Kiosk (EK)**

Educational Kiosk (EK) is regarded as a friendly electronic media in communication<sup>12</sup>. Enhanced by internet and intranet connection system, its role resembles the roles of front line staff. It is practical and can be used interactively. In a large hospital, information access by means of EK has certainly reduced tremendous number of complaints, increase efficiency and productivity. It is also a good idea if this concept can be extended into their residential areas<sup>13</sup>.

Being in situ technology, EK can be comprehensively managed to accommodate all personalized matter through empowerment strategy. Special managerial team involving the relevant departments in the hospital, particularly information technology, patient education, health promotion, media unit and nursing, is important to examine and to improve on the contents, whenever necessary<sup>14</sup>. Regular meetings can be arranged to review various educational needs put forward by various stake holders in the hospital and translate it into the digital information and management. Short training courses can be arranged so that its users, particularly patients' relatives will be better equipped to make use of EK, independently.

## **4. Printed media**

Printed media is still relevant in educating patients and their relatives, despite the advancement in electronic media technology<sup>15</sup>. Even though it is conventional, but it is one of the effective and popular media which deliver message especially to those who are illiterate. Its capability to highlight visual subjects is more appealing and has many advantages over words. They can convey messages very quickly to many people at all corners of the world, and more importantly they can be stored for easier reference in the future.

Printed media in communication could either be the flipcharts, pamphlets, booklets, cards, posters and fliers. In the next few paragraphs the discussion is based on the selected media which could help to empower the relatives in order to ensure better patient management.

### ***i. Flipcharts***

Flipchart has long been used to facilitate the communication between health care provider, patients and their relatives. Flipchart has its advantages as it could be tailored according to the patients' illness. Flipchart contains informative pictures and simplified explanation regarding an illness or a treatment plan that can be explained easily to both patients and relatives.

Health care professional will have direct communication with the patient and the relatives in an interactive manner, by explaining issues and subjects of interest face to face with them, with the help of the flipcharts, and thus, improves the understanding of certain illnesses and treatments of the patients. It helps in increasing the involvement of the relatives when they are more enlightened about the illnesses and also will help them to make informed decisions. Flipcharts used to empower relatives, should contain information on how to take care of patient with certain diseases. If it only contains information on the disease itself, it is not very useful in the context of empowering the relatives for a better patient management. The flipcharts can be designed to attract the attention of the relatives by using attractive pictures and colours. Apart from that, flipcharts can help health personnel to explain regarding patient care to illiterate relatives as pictures would be more meaningful.

The flipcharts should be stationed at the places where the health personnel need explain to patients and their relatives regarding the disease suffered by the patient and why the patient needed admission and also how relatives could help them in the ward. Therefore the best place should be at the emergency department or clinics. Every hospital should have their own sets of flipcharts on the disease and how relatives could help in taking care of patient in the ward.

### ***ii. Pamphlets***

Pamphlets might also be used as a tool of relative's empowerment. Its content can be

used to make patient and relatives be more knowledgeable about their illness and their family. The advantage of using pamphlets is that pamphlet is concise and easy for the patient relatives to understand the illness, and also they can read it at their own pace and comfort.

The content of the pamphlets could be made into a simplified text or even pictures so that it appeared more understandable for the relatives.

The pamphlets can also be customized into what the relatives needs to understand about the illness, ways of treatment, the medication and most importantly how the relatives can help patient with that disease while they are admitted to the ward and after they have been discharged. The pamphlets with that kind of content are rarely seen in reality because most of us, healthcare providers concentrate on giving information on the disease itself while taking for granted the role of family and relatives in managing patients.

### ***iii. Booklet***

Booklet is another way to empower people. This is because it contains more information and we know that information is actually power. Most medical centres use booklets to communicate with their patients and relatives regarding technical aspects of the diseases and also the services provided in a very simplified language.

In the context of relative empowerment, booklet can be regarded as the textbook of reference. It is second to the previous two methods, as it provides in depth explanation of illness and its related activities. Provided free of charge, booklet should be made available at all patient registration lobbies or counters of admission. Staff should be sensitive about its use and voluntarily distribute this material to everyone they come into contact, especially to the relatives who are taking care of the patients. Facility that is well equipped with educational material including booklet has been proven effective in empowering the whole family towards total patient care<sup>15</sup>.

## **5. Advertising Media**

In this modern day, we can not deny the power of advertising media to provide new concept of education to the care givers although its general approach still focus on the unhealthy

agenda<sup>16</sup>. Using its standard approach of utilizing icons or public figures, it is an innovative idea as a large number of people will be able to be captured.

Although it is just an awareness message, advertising media such as gigantic billboard, TV commercial, newspaper advertising, radio commercial, bunting and poster are certainly the best options in the future. Moving the content from personalized consumption towards caring of others in more friendly manner are an innovative idea that all the parties should participate and progress towards it<sup>17</sup>.

Collaboration with other relevant authorities, advertising agencies, and large organization under its Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives, would be a very useful mechanism to ensure this concept of education will be the trend of the future.

## CONCLUSION

Relatives' empowerment is very important area that needs to be emphasized to ensure better patient management. The role of media in relative's education in support of patient care is undeniable. The most potential media ought to be identified and it's content to be managed well. It must be incorporated with an interactive approach in order to have more self-involvement and in a sustainable way. The need to use this approach is timely and must be initiated.

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