

IMPORTANCE OF SOFTSKILLS TRAINING IN HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY IN INDIA

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“A good physician treats the disease, while a great physician treats the patient who has the disease”- William Osler.

Medical Profession like many other in the service industry is heavily invested in dealing with people, what distinguishes it from other professions is that it deals with people when they're devoid of their normal state.

If you have visited a doctor, you are all too familiar with the cold and mechanical way of pushing his stethoscope against your chest, his hurried ways of examination, his impatient handing over of prescription and his irritation at the sound of any query. We are so used to this experience that absence of this baffles us and even makes us doubt the credentials of the Doctor.

With healthcare sector in India growing at a healthy pace of 15% CAGR it is said to reach \$158.2 bn by 2017. This growing sector has attracted investments from several healthcare giants from India and abroad. The healthcare space is becoming

highly competitive with every hospital fighting for the patients' "share of disease" to cure. The practitioners can no longer adopt the callous attitude towards the patient as they did a few years ago.

Though healthcare penetration is at dismal levels, for those who can access the service the choices are plenty. Technology is no longer a differentiator, as many healthcare equipment suppliers are coming up with creative financing models, technology is no farther than an arm's reach for a hospital of any size.

There is a change in the trend in the typical consumer of healthcare in India with overseas travel no longer a novelty, many people who have travelled abroad and experienced superior healthcare expect the same from the service providers back home.

A stunning building, clean and hygienic surroundings, but indifferent attitude by the staff can prove to be the deal breaker for many of the clients. This is the area where strong competencies can be built which might prove to be a substantial competitive advantage in the long run. The industry is starting to look towards adopting best

customer service practices from hospitality industry where customer truly is 'king'.

The Flipside of the Coin- Why are healthcare practitioners indifferent?

Everyone who takes up Medicine or Allied professions as a career choice does so out of passion his/her passion to serve. However, countless hours of clinical postings and repeated exposure to the suffering, desensitizes them. If the practitioner would get emotionally invested with every patient he/she treats, he/she would do so at the cost of sacrificing objectivity in assessment. Hence they always have a tight rope to walk. However, to remain objective the practitioner cannot afford to remove himself from the patient's suffering so much so that he/she would start viewing the patient as merely a 'Case' (A common jargon allocated to a patient in hospitals) and not a human being who is suffering.

On the other hand, many of the para medical staff are often over worked for a poor pay. Hence in the absence of Hygiene factors¹, there is not much motivation for the person to be empathetic towards the patients.

Essential Patient Service Skills for any Healthcare Practitioner

- Empathy²
- Strong communication skills
- Ability to work in teams
- Leadership skills – based on the position one holds

Empathy: It is defined as the ability of a person to see things from other's perspective. It requires strong communication skills for the person to understand other's perspective and an equally strong imagination to visualise

¹ Herzberg's Two factor theory

² Though there is some debate if empathy is a skill. It is a product of strong communication skills &

himself in other's position. This skill forms the basis for a positive patient-practitioner relationship. If a practitioner empathizes with a patient, everything else falls into place. He would be more sensitive towards care the patient's suffering and is unlikely to treat the suffering human being as just another file, full of symptoms and test results for which an optimum solution has to be arrived at.

Strong communication skills: The practitioner should have the ability to listen to the patient very carefully and decipher the symptoms through a critical analysis process. The ability to read between the lines is very crucial as many of the symptoms are not expressed in so many words, missing these would mean merely treating the manifested symptoms and not the underlying disease, which would lead to repeated patient visits and decrease in the quality of the care.

A patient who feels he is being heard, is more likely to comply with the treatment, thereby increasing the effectiveness of the treatment.

Ability to work in teams: Delivery of healthcare is increasingly becoming a team effort, with patient satisfaction at the centre. From the time the patient steps into the hospital, to the time they step out of the hospital, they have multiple touch points such as,

- Front desk executives
- Nurse stations
- Doctors
- Lab/Radiology technicians
- Billing executives.

Breakdown in communication at any of these points adversely effects the

Imagination both of which can be acquired.

Explained here

<http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/empathy.html>

perceived quality of care. Hence the practitioners and the support staff alike should be able to work in a cross-functional team to ensure superior patient experience.

Leadership Skills: Healthcare industry is constantly battling emergency situations as well as shortage of manpower, hence it is not always that the right person would be available at the right time. All the practitioners and the support staff alike should have the ability to take stock of the situation in a crisis and manage it till it can be handed over to the right person. To that end leadership skills are essential in any person working in the healthcare industry.

The need for Patient-service skills (soft skills) alongside strong technical capabilities in today's competitive healthcare industry cannot be overstated. Healthcare service providers should start designing process which revolve around Patient experience and satisfaction. To design and implement these processes and practices, the industry would require professionals who are not just technically strong but are sensitized towards the suffering of the patients.

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