

Patient Relationship Management and its Role in Health Care Industry

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Abstract

Patient relationship management includes all facets of interaction a hospital has with its patients, whether it is out-patient or in-patient. It uses technology to sort processes that influence patient loyalty, service delivery and quality management. Patient relationship management also aims to assess role of patient database in success of health care organization and to implement new marketing approaches in fetching and retaining patients in healthcare industry. Healthcare organizations build the relationship with patients offering more realistic benefits to them. Often, different hospitals use different patient information systems which are not always compatible with each other. Hospitals are the key element in any healthcare delivery system and play the most important role in maintaining and restoring the health of the people. In health care system, patient relationship management practices have become one of the crucial elements for measurement of efficiency of hospital services. These practices are essentially patient focused strategies that involve effective management of hospital interface and interaction with patients.

Keywords: Patient communication, patient satisfaction, patient reminder, compliance, counseling, patient motivation, patient participation, patient engagement.

Introduction

Patient relationship management is a procedure used by health care establishments to recognize their patient groups and respond rapidly and straightway to the changing patient requirements. It permits hospitals to collect and manage enormous amounts of patient data and to apply these strategies for better service quality and patient satisfaction. The information collected through identified patient relationship management initiatives, help the health care organization to solve particular patient relationship problems in the business chain, from initially targeting patients to efforts to earn profits. Good coordination of relationships with patients and its role in acquiring competitive advantage is now the key interest of all health care establishments.

Using patient relationship management program with an approach based on customer value can offer many benefits, for example, maximizing of revenues, minimizing costs of uncollectable debts or disputes with patients, return of investment, enhancing acquisition and retention of profitable patients and ability of

activation of dormant patients.^[1] A patient relation management application can also provide better care for patients by allowing hospitals a better understanding of patient needs through improved communication via follow-up systems. Effective patient relationship management practices in a hospital may mean providing service-related information to patient very quickly, responding to the patient's appointment and admission requests promptly, dealing with patients and extending the best of care and courtesies to them. Patient relationship management strategies may help hospitals to enhance many of their relationships with patients and their relatives and stakeholders like hospital administrators, medical and paramedical staff, and community at large. The patient relationship management in hospital should be seen as a wide growth strategy to serve, satisfy, retain and attract patients by using the latest technology to create personal, caring and service-oriented interface. Thus, we investigate the challenges and effectiveness of use of patient relationship management in health care industry. To attain present targets, information has been gathered from secondary da-

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ta sources like books on management, marketing management, services marketing, patient relationship management in hospitals, government publications including journals and reports, hospital publications, medical journals, earlier research articles and case studies from newspapers and other sources, publicized service records of hospitals, publicized legal records of judicial cases, internet websites of hospitals, internet blogs etc.

Patient Relationship Management and Health Care System

The biggest management challenge in the new millennium of liberalization and globalization for business is to serve and maintain good relations with the king, the customer. Customer relationship management, which has overriding significance for any business, is no less significant for hospital services. Hospitals are the major constituents in any healthcare delivery system that play important role in maintaining and restoring the health of the people. Care of the sick and injured, preventive health care, health-related research and training of medical and paramedical staff are general broad functions of a hospital. It involves both outpatient as well as inpatient hospital services and emergency medical services. Challenge in the business outlook can be defined as a difficult task or problem something that is hard to do which clearly reflect that challenges depict hurdles that a business has to face in its existing environment.^[2] The first opportunity that any health care organization gets to amaze and create prolonged impression is patient service. Great service keeps patients in the center of the business and is therefore designed around them which tend to create a long term relationship beyond just making a sale.^[3]

Key Elements of Patient Relationship Management for Hospitals

Following are key points in patient relationship management in hospital:

1. Collection of data related to personal details of the patients, frequency of their visits to hospital, admission of patients, medical history, discharges, attendants, details of physicians etc. from across the enterprise, recording it and maintaining a database or the master file.
2. Analyzing the data and identifying the potential profitable customers, formulating the best marketing opportunities for them and finding best medium to communicate with the identified targets.
3. Development of marketing campaigns for increasing the number of patients and retaining the same for generating profit for the hospital. Tracking the effectiveness and return on investment from these campaigns.^[4]

A study indicates that patient relationship management can target the influencing factors that are indicative to the degree of patient satisfaction in an organization and also assess its value during the course of the entire process.^[5] Patient satisfaction can also be built based on the foundation of trust as well as the commitment given by the organization. This could be immensely helpful as a marketing strategy in the long run, as word of mouth marketing is one of the best forms of marketing which involves minimal investment with the largest results. Employee satisfaction motivates the employees to give their best in the organization. This would result in better functioning of health care organizations and reduced waiting times for the patients as well as memorable experience with the particular hospital or nursing home.^[6]

Enhanced level of patient satisfaction helps to develop a strong relationship with patients which could result in a better patient-centric approach. Building a good relationship with patients is also very useful in increasing the degree of loyalty among them. Patient satisfaction would automatically lead to patient retention as the patients become loyal towards the particular hospital and the profitability of the hospitals would increase drastically.^[7]

Implementation of Patient Relationship Management in Health Care System

Patient relationship management system needs daily accumulation of data from both in-patient and out-patient department's terminals through multi-media platform and integration with other ancillary technical systems that enable an effective patient relationship management system to be completed after the following has been accomplished:

1. Integration of patient relationship management system with Hospital Information System.
2. Integration of patient relationship management system with Hospital Web Platform.
3. Integration of patient relationship management system with Call Centers.
4. Integration of patient relationship management with short-message gateway.
5. Establishment of patient Responding Mechanism and Database.^[8]

The use of technology in patient relationship management in health care organizations continues to have a short-term tendency in the form of debatable connection, when customers are in fact seeking brand participation and co-development of value. Employees will also play an indispensable role in the successful execution of social patient relationship management programme. One of the core issues presently faced by health care in-

dustry is the ability of employees to derive meaning from both organized and unorganized data available on social networking sites.^[9] Patient service has become a very essential part with increase in competition within the industry.^[10] It has been found that most patients using healthcare facilities are middle aged persons between 49 to 58 years, making it important to focus on implementation of more management practices targeting this segment of patients to make cordial relation with them. It was found that over 50% of the patients agreed that the service providers are giving high preference to the quality of services and patient satisfaction while providing services, indicating patient relationship management to be still in developing stage in hospitals with their primary target being quality of service. The service providers are giving direct cash benefit to patients to affect their satisfaction levels with the quality of services, also apart from using technology and investing in patient relationship management software.^[11]

Conclusion

This article attempted to identify the modern patient service challenges in the field of healthcare industry. Customers are termed as kings in industry because it always cordially focuses on meeting and exceeding their needs. However, at this juncture, several unique and seemingly new challenges have been continuously emerging in the industry. After having conducted a review of patient relationship management notions and literature on social networking marketing, it is suggested that a consolidated conceptual model which emerges is a critical element to attain fiscal results in form of brand loyalty. Healthcare professionals can evaluate their patient relationship management and electronic marketing plan by reviewing their corporation capability in terms of operating environment, understanding administration processes and automated patient relationship management. Much of the Indian population depends on the public hospitals for the diagnosis and treatment of their diseases and conditions. The healthcare infrastructure at the same time is grossly underdeveloped and the present system is not well equipped to handle the huge inflow of patients on a daily basis. Meanwhile, the present infrastructure needs to be utilized in an optimal manner so as to cater to the needs and demands of as many patients as possible. This could be accomplished by the adoption of the patient relationship management technology into public hospitals. With increasing professionalism in all the departments of a hospital, patient relations have become more oriented to management science. The effectiveness or the utility of a manager depends a lot on personal skills, human, technical and conceptual based on scientific foundations. The role of patient relations in building up an environment of faith, belief, reliability and quality

assurance in a hospital cannot be underestimated.

Scope for Further Study

1. Research on marketing practices implemented by large hospitals through family physicians, private medical practitioners and small healthcare establishments to inform about facilities and services available with the hospital needs to be done extensively.
2. Research on comparison between patient relationship management practices of hospitals of urban and rural areas has to be undertaken.
3. Marketing practices adopted in different types of healthcare establishments also needs to be studied in depth.
4. The effect of patient relationship management practices in generating profits for the hospitals has to be investigated.
5. Research on patient relationship management practices in single specialty hospitals should also be conducted.

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