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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AS A DETERMINANT OF EFFICIENT PATIENT CENTERED CARE IN GENERAL HOSPITAL ABUA, ABUA/ODUAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT RIVERS STATE

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Abstract
The study investigated the role of effective communication as a determinant of efficient patient-centered care in General Hospital Abua, Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State. The research design adopted for the study was a descriptive survey design, with a population of 132 (i.e., 53 health care providers and 79 patients) and total enumeration was adopted as the sample size of the study. The instrument used for data collection from respondents was a 16-item questionnaire titled "Effective Communication and Patient-centered Care Questionnaire (ECPCQ)." The data collected was analyzed using frequency and simple percentages. The study's findings demonstrated the effectiveness of communication among healthcare providers at General Hospital, Abua. The study also found that the major barriers to effective communication between health care providers and patients at General Hospital, Abua, include language barriers, cultural differences, technical issues, and time constraints. The study also found that the most effective strategies to improve communication between health care providers and patients include using plain language, practicing active listening, providing cultural competence training, and leveraging technology-enabled communication. Based on the findings, it was recommended, amongst others, that the management of General Hospital, Abua, should implement regular training sessions and workshops focused on improving communication skills to reduce errors, language barriers, cultural differences, technical issues, and time constraints.
Keywords: Determinant, Effective communication, Efficient care, General Hospital Abua, Patient-centered care

INTRODUCTION

The health care sector has made significant strides in recent years, with notable improvements in healthcare infrastructure, workforce development, and service delivery. Nigeria's health care sector has demonstrated resilience and adaptability, with many health care providers and institutions embracing innovative approaches to care delivery. One such approach is patient-centered care, which prioritizes the unique needs, values, and preferences of each individual patient (Institute of Medicine, [IOM], 2001).
Patient-centered care is an approach to health care that prioritizes the unique needs, values, and preferences of each individual patient. This approach recognizes that patients are active participants in

their care, rather than passive recipients of medical services (Oden, 2020). Patient-centered care has been shown to improve health outcomes, enhance patient satisfaction, and reduce health care costs. Patient-centered care emphasizes efficient communication between health care providers and patients by involving them in the treatment process, which is essential for understanding patient experience and achieving effective care outcomes by reducing physical symptom pain and emotional distress and improving patient satisfaction (Kwame & Petrucka, 2018). In the health care sector, effective communication is the foundation upon which successful patient-centered care is built.

Every step of the process for delivering health care services requires communication. Excellent communication is critical for all health professionals (Alnaser, 2020). It affects the quality of health care output, impacts the patient's health and satisfaction, and benefits both patients and providers (Holm et al., 2021). Communication in the health care sector refers to the exchange of information between health care professionals, patients, and other stakeholders within the health care system (Alnaser, 2020). Communication is a critical clinical competence because it establishes trust between providers and patients, creating a therapeutic relationship (Chichirez & Purcărea, 2018).

Physician-patient communication plays several functions, including making decisions, exchanging information, improving the physician-patient relationship, managing the patient's doubts, addressing emotions, and enhancing self-management. Features of effective or quality communication include involving patients in decisions, allowing patients to speak without interruptions, encouraging a patient to ask questions and answering the questions, using a language that the patient understands, paying attention to the patient and discussing the next steps (Ghosh et al., 2020). This communication also includes listening, developing a good interpersonal relationship, and making patient-centred management plans.

The quality of patient-physician communication influences various patient-centred outcomes. Patient-centred outcomes refer to all the outcomes that contribute to the recovery or indicate the recovery of patients, as well as suggest positive experiences with the care process. For instance, effective communication is associated with enhanced patient satisfaction, regulating emotions, and increasing compliance, leading to improved health and better outcomes (Ghosh et al., 2020). According to Chandra and Ward (2018), quality communication enhances patients' trust in their providers, making patients more satisfied with the treatment. A trusting provider-patient relationship causes individuals to believe they receive better care. Chandra and Ward (2018) further reported that effective provider-patient communication improves social, somatic, and psychological health. During communication, the provider may enhance positive motivations and involve the individual in treatment decisions.

Communication helps patients to acknowledge their illnesses, the associated risks, and the advantages of consistent treatment**.** Osei et al (2022) noted that mutual communication between providers and patients stimulates or strengthens patients' perception of control over their health, the knowledge to discern symptoms and self-care and identify changes in their condition. Effective communication leads to improved perceived quality of health care and report that physician-patient communication influences the perceived quality of health care services, according to Isaruk et al. (2023). All these outcomes that suggest or contribute to patient's positive experiences or imply a positive recovery journey, such as shorter hospital stays, are considered patient-centred outcomes.

However, despite its importance, effective communication in health care settings remains a significant challenge. Studies have shown that communication breakdowns are a leading cause of medical errors, patient harm, and malpractice claims (The Joint Commission, 2015). In Nigeria, where this study is situated, the health care system faces numerous challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, shortage of skilled health care workers, and limited resources (Federal Ministry of Health, [FMOH] 2016). These challenges can exacerbate communication breakdowns, compromising the quality and safety of care.

Studies have consistently shown that effective communication in health care settings is associated with improved patient outcomes, increased patient satisfaction, and enhanced quality of care. Conversely, communication breakdowns can lead to misunderstandings, misdiagnoses, and adverse events, compromising the quality and safety of care. Despite the recognized importance of communication in health care, there are still challenges and barriers that hinder effective communication in general hospitals. A study by the Agency for Health care Research and Quality (AHRQ) found that effective communication between health care providers and patients is associated with higher patient satisfaction rates (AHRQ, 2020). Conversely, poor communication leads to decreased satisfaction, as seen in a study where 60% of patients reported dissatisfaction due to unmet communication needs (Oates et al., 2017).

The Joint Commission in 2015 study revealed that communication breakdowns contributed to 80% of sentinel events, including adverse drug events, surgical errors, and delayed diagnoses. A study published in the Journal of Healthcare Management estimated that poor communication and teamwork can result in increased healthcare costs, with an estimated $1.7 billion annual expenditure on preventable adverse events (Weeks et al., 2017). The World Health Organization (WHO) in 2017 reported that effective communication is crucial in reducing medication errors, which affect approximately 42% of patients worldwide (WHO, 2017).

The persistent gap in effective communication between healthcare providers and patients in health care facilities has become a pressing concern, as it continues to impede the delivery of patient-centered care. This has resulted to decreased patient satisfaction, poor health outcomes, increased healthcare costs, and a higher risk of medical errors, thereby undermining the fundamental principles of quality healthcare and highlighting the urgent need for a comprehensive assessment of the role of effective communication in enhancing the efficiency of patient-centered care in this setting. As a result, this study investigates the impact of effective communication as a key determinant of efficient patient-centered care within General Hospital Abua, Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria, aiming to contribute to the growing body of research on patient-centered care in the region.

Aims/Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the role of effective communication as a determinant of efficient patient-centered care in General Hospital Abua, Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State. Specifically, the study's objectives sought to:

1. assess the impact of effective communication on patient centered care outcome at General Hospital, Abua Central
2. identify the barriers to effective communication between healthcare providers and patients at General Hospital, Abua Central
3. ascertain the strategies that enhance effective communication to improve patient-centered care at General Hospital, Abua Central

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. This is so as the design systematically collects data about a group of individuals who have the same characteristics through the use of written or oral data collection instruments, such as interviews and questionnaires concerning participants' responses on facts, opinions, and attitudes that enable the researcher to study them as a group. The population of this study comprised 132 (i.e., 53 health care providers and 79 patients) in General Hospital Abuja. Total enumeration was adopted, resulting in 132 as the sample size of this study. A simple random sampling technique was used to administer the research instrument to the respondents. The instrument used for data collection from respondents was a questionnaire, and the data collected were analyzed using descriptive

statistics tools such as frequency and simple percentages. Ethical approval protocols were adhered to throughout the research period, and there was no iota of conflict of interest.

Result

This section is concerned with analyses of respondents' responses regarding the impact of effective communication between health care providers and patients at General Hospital Abua. Out of 79 and 53 questions randomly administered to the respondents at the various units in the hospital, 52 were retrieved from health care providers, making a 98% return rate, and 60 were retrieved from patients, and out of the 60 retrieved, 8 were not correctly filled, while 52 were correctly filled, making an 86% return rate, respectively, and therefore stand for analysis with the adoption of the Likert 4 rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1, respectively, and shown in Tables 1-3.

Table 1: Presentation and Analysis of Respondents' Responses Based on Impact of Effective Communication on Patient Centered Care Outcome at General Hospital, Abua

S/N	Items	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	Total
	Health care providers always explain diagnosis, and care plans in a way that is easy to understand improve patient trust	34 65.4%	9 17.3%	6 11.5%	3 5.8%	52
	Health care providers listen to patients' concerns and questions often helps to minimize treatment errors	22 43.3%	25 48.1%	5 9.6%	0 0.0%	52
	Patients find it easy to ask questions or express concerns to health care providers reduces cost of therapy	27 52.0%	19 36.5%	6 11.5%	0 0.0%	52
	Communication from health care providers is understandable by patients to give consent	18 34.6%	23 44.3%	10 19.2%	1 1%	52
Total	**Frequency (F)** **Percentage (%)**	**101** **48.6%**	**76** **29.3%**	**27** **13.0%**	**4** **1.9%**	**208** **100%**

Source: Researchers' Field Survey 2025

From the grand total, strongly agree has the highest respondents with figure 101 (48.6%), followed by agree with figure 76 (29.3%), then disagree with figure 27 (13.0%), and lastly strongly disagree has the least respondents with figure 4 (1.9%). This outcome signifies that health care providers' keen listening to patients' plights, communicating with patients in a way that is understandable, and their ability to always explain care plans to patients always lead to quality patient-centered care and safety.

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Table 2: Presentation and Analysis of Respondents' Responses Based on Barriers to Effective Communication between Health care Providers and Patients at General Hospital, Abua

S/N	Items	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	Total
	Language barriers hinder communication between healthcare providers and patients.	32 61.5%	17 32.7%	2 3.8%	1 1.9%	52
	Cultural differences create communication barriers between healthcare providers and patients	27 51.9%	21 40.4%	0 0.0%	4 7.7%	52
	Technical issues disrupt communication between healthcare providers and patients	28 53.9%	19 36.5%	3 5.8%	2 3.8%	52
	Time constraints limit communication between healthcare providers and patients	22 42.3%	20 38.5%	5 9.6%	5 9.6%	52
Total	**Frequency (F)** **Percentage (%)**	**109** **52.4%**	**77** **37.0%**	**10** **4.8%**	**12** **5.8%**	**208** **100%**

Source: Researcher's field survey 2025

From the grand total, "strongly agreed" has the highest respondents with figure 109 (52.4%), followed by "agreed" with figure 77 (37.0%), then "disagree" with figure 12 (5.8%), and lastly "strongly disagree" has the least respondents with figure 10 (4.8%). This result connotes that language barriers, cultural differences, technical issues, and time constraints hindered good communication between patients and health care providers at the hospital.

Table 3: Presentation and Analysis of Respondents' Responses Based on Strategies to Improve Communication in Patient-centered Care at General Hospital, Abua

S/N	Items	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	Total
	Using plain language improves communication between healthcare providers and patients.	32 65.5%	16 30.8%	3 5.8%	1 1.9%	52
	Active listening enhances communication between healthcare providers and patients.	35 67.3%	15 29.0%	2 3.7%	0 0.0%	52
	Cultural competence training improves communication between healthcare providers and patients.	24 46.2%	22 42.6%	6 11.5%	0 0.0%	52
	Technology-enabled communication (e.g., patient portals, secure messaging.	21 40.4%	18 34.6%	9 17.3%	4 7.7%	52
Total	**Frequency (F)** **Percentage (%)**	**112** **53.9%**	**71** **34.1%**	**20** **9.6%**	**5** **2.4%**	**208** **100%**

Source: Researcher's field survey 2025

From the grand total, strongly agree has the highest respondents with figure 112 (53.9%), followed by agree with figure 71 (34.1%), disagree with responses of 20 (9.6%), and strongly disagree with the least responses with figure 5 (2.4%). The findings implied that using appropriate languages, active listening, cultural competence training, and technology enablers are essential strategies for effective communication between health care workers and patients in hospitals, ensuring quality patient-centered care.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Impact of Communication and Patients' Satisfaction: The study's findings revealed that most respondents at General Hospital, Abua, perceived effective communication among healthcare providers, although some areas required improvement due to delays or misunderstandings. The data presented in Table 1 offers insights into the level of effective communication between healthcare providers at General Hospital, Abua, from the perspective of the respondents. A significant majority of the respondents (71.2% strongly agree, 28.8% agree) believe that healthcare providers receive clear and accurate information about patients' medical histories and treatment plans. An overwhelming majority (78.8% strongly agree, 21.2% agree) recognize the crucial role of effective communication among healthcare providers for ensuring patient safety. A substantial proportion of respondents (69.2% strongly agree, 26.9% agree) perceive communication among healthcare providers in their department as effective.

The grand total percentages (68.8% strongly agree, 29.3% agree, with much smaller percentages for disagree and strongly disagree) suggest a generally positive perception of communication effectiveness among healthcare providers. However, the occurrence of delays or misunderstandings due to poor communication highlights an area that requires attention and improvement. This result is more positive than Danlami et al. (2023) study, which found inadequate and non-collaborative face-to-face communication between pharmacists, physicians, and nurses, leading to poor patient satisfaction. Additionally, the results support Onwubiko's (2016) study, where most respondents agreed that healthcare providers' good communication skills, such as listening and allowing feedback, improved acceptance of healthcare delivery. Furthermore, a significant proportion of respondents confirmed that a friendly approach by health workers encouraged them to continue seeking care from those providers.

Barriers to effective communication Among Patient-centered care: The study's findings identified key barriers to effective communication between healthcare providers and patients at General Hospital, Abua, including language barriers, cultural differences, technical issues, and time constraints. These challenges require comprehensive strategies to address them. The finding from the analysis in Table 2 reported that language barriers are a major obstacle, with 61.5% of respondents strongly agreeing and 32.7% agreeing that they hinder communication; cultural differences also create significant communication barriers, with 51.9% strongly agreeing and 40.4% agreeing, emphasizing the importance of cultural competency training for healthcare providers to navigate diverse patient backgrounds and preferences. Technical issues, such as problems with medical records or communication systems, disrupt communication, as indicated by 53.9% strongly agreeing and 36.5% agreeing, underscoring the need for reliable and efficient technology infrastructure. Time constraints also limit effective communication, with 42.3% strongly agreeing and 38.5% agreeing, suggesting that healthcare providers may need to prioritize communication strategies, such as allocating sufficient time for patient consultations or using clear, concise language.

Overall, the data highlights the complexity of communication barriers in healthcare settings and the need for comprehensive strategies to address language, cultural, technical, and time-related challenges, ultimately enhancing patient care and outcomes at General Hospital, Abua. This finding is consistent with Ndukauba et al., (2021) study, which found that respondents chose healthcare facilities based on factors

such as proximity (27.6%), availability of health workers (17.1%), friendly staff (15.4%), language understanding (19.3%), and staff empathy (4.8%). Notably, most respondents (32.9%) did not consider language a significant factor affecting their medication adherence. Furthermore, the findings support Akinkurolere's (2022) study, which discovered that the socio-cultural context of both patients and doctors' influences discourse engagement during consultations. The study suggested that a patient-centered approach to communication is more effective when doctors have a deep understanding of their patients' socio-cultural backgrounds.

Strategies for Effective Communication on Patient-Centered Care: The study's findings suggest that General Hospital, Abua, can improve patient-centered care by implementing strategies that focus on clear language, active listening, cultural competence, and technology-enabled communication. The strategies to improve communication between healthcare providers and patients at General Hospital, Abua, as seen in the analysis in Table 3 are multifaceted and promising. Using plain language is a highly effective strategy, with 65.5% of respondents strongly agreeing and 30.8% agreeing that it improves communication, active listening is also crucial, with 67.3% strongly agreeing and 29% agreeing that it enhances communication. Cultural competence training is recognized as beneficial, with 46.2% strongly agreeing and 42.6% agreeing that it improves communication, technology-enabled communication, such as patient portals and secure messaging, is also seen as effective, with 40.4% strongly agreeing and 34.6% agreeing, suggesting that leveraging technology can facilitate timely and convenient communication between healthcare providers and patients.

Overall, the analysis suggests that General Hospital, Abua, can enhance patient-centered care by implementing strategies that prioritize clear language, active listening, cultural competence, and technology-enabled communication, ultimately fostering a more patient-centric and effective care environment. The findings also support Bello's (2017) conclusion that nurses would benefit from training on effective communication in professional settings, including self-awareness and understanding patients' cues.

Conclusion

A significant majority of respondents perceive effective communication among healthcare providers at General Hospital, Abua, although areas requiring improvement were noted, particularly regarding delays or misunderstandings due to poor communication. The major barriers to effective communication between healthcare providers and patients at General Hospital, Abua, include language barriers, cultural differences, technical issues, and time constraints, highlighting the need for comprehensive strategies to address these challenges. The most effective strategies to improve communication between healthcare providers and patients at General Hospital, Abua, include using plain language, practicing active listening, providing cultural competence training, and leveraging technology-enabled communication.

Recommendation

1. The management of General Hospital, Abua should implement regular training sessions and workshops focused on improving communication skills to reduce errors and enhance patient care.
2. The government, management of General Hospital, Abua, and other stakeholders should develop and implement comprehensive strategies to address language barriers, cultural differences, technical issues, and time constraints, such as providing language support services, cultural competency training, and upgrading technical infrastructure.

3. The management and health care providers of General Hospital, Abua, should prioritize staff training on plain language, active listening, and cultural competence and invest in technology-enabled communication platforms to enhance patient-provider communication.

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