

SCHOOL OF NURSING AND ALLIED HEALTH SCIENCES

PD101

PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

Public Relations Program

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**1. Introduction**

Public relations are considered as a vital aspect of any type of organization in the world. Since it is something about the impression of an organization, it can directly affect the public attitude, income and trust of the organization. In other words, public relations aspect is the key to win hearts of the people.

In order to understand this, we can have a look at some definitions of public relations. According to BusinessDictionary (2015), it is the profession or practice of creating and maintaining goodwill of an organization’s various publics (customers, employees, investors, suppliers etc.), usually through publicity and other nonpaid forms of communication. These efforts may also include support of arts, charitable causes, education, sporting events, and other civil engagements.

According to this definition, it is clear that public relations are aimed towards maintaining goodwill of the public of the organization. Hence, organizations conduct various activities in order to maintain the goodwill of their internal and external public.

Another definition is “public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (PRSA, 2009). This definition views public relations as a communication process. It provides benefits for both organization and the public of the organization.

In healthcare setting, public relations aspect has a similar importance, because hospital trade has became a competitive area in modern society. According to Public Relations handbook (n.d.), well executed public relations will;

* increase visibility for the hospital, employees, programs and services
* position the hospital as a healthcare leader & authority within the community or region
* expand awareness of the hospital’s entire range of programs and services
* enhance the hospital’s image
* aid in recruitment and retention of employees
* support efforts to raise funds for new programs & services or assist with the passage of levels & bonds
* act as a foundation when negative news about the hospital occur
* boost employee morale

A study conducted by Tengilimogulu et al (2007) shows that public relation activities are crucial factors in determining consumer hospital choice. Therefore, public relations have an important place in hospital setting as well as any other organization. This condition is more prominent in privet hospitals where clients pay for the service and expect a higher level of patient care.

In this paper, I am going to organize a public relations program for the staff of the outpatient department of Lanka Hospital. As the in charge of this department, I was requested develop this program emphasizing on personal development of my staff, with a focus on meeting the goals of this hospital.

**2. Public Relations Plan**

This public relations plan for Lanka Hospital, Colombo will be implemented in order to upgrade the quality of the service of each and every staff member of the Out Patient Department.

It is very important to conduct this type of program for an Out Patient Department, because patients and other visitors to the hospital usually get their first and lasting impression about the hospital from their initial contact with the Out Patient Department.

**2.1 Our mission**

To provide multidisciplinary access to healthcare in order to satisfy all the healthcare needs in the people of Sri Lanka.

**2.2 Goals**

- Upgrading the hospital to 2000 beds in the next 05 years

- Establishing the finest pediatric ward in the city of Colombo in next 03 years

- Achieving the state of best privet hospital with the most pleasant environment in Sri Lanka within next 03 years

**2.3 Objectives**

- Increase the quality of Service of the staff of the Out Patient Department within next 03 months

- Reduce the number of complaints regarding the customer care of the Out Patient Department within next 03 months

- Increase the revenue of the hospital which is getting through the Out Patient Department by 50% within next 06 months

**2.4 Target Audience**

Target audience of this public relations program will be 10 staff members of the Out Patient Department. This includes Receptionists, Nurses, Doctors, Cashiers and minor staff.

**2.5 Organizing the program / strategies**

- Conducting an initial meeting with the participation of the Hospital Director, Chief Nursing Officer, Marketing Manager, Public Relations Officer and the staff of the Out Patient Department

- Determining goals, assigning tasks and creating an evaluation / monitoring mechanism

- Conducting lecture-discussion sessions (by the resource personnel)

- Conducting group discussion sessions to identify the problems and suggest solutions

- Implementing the proposed tasks

- Continuous monitoring / reassessment

- Conducting a survey to evaluate outcome

**2.6 Resource Personnel**

- Dr. B.D. Perera. Head of the Quality Assurance Authority, Sri Lanka

- Mr. S. Jayarathne. Marketing Manager, Lanka Hospitals, Colombo.

- Ms. S. de Silva. Senior Nursing Lecturer, University of Ceylon.

**3. Problems identified / complaints done by the clients**

- Rough behavior of the staff

- Undue delay and long queues

- No correct guidance and directions are provided inside the hospital

- Busy receptionists and nursing staff who are not able to attend the clients individually

- Lack of privacy in the Out Patient Department

- Delay of the cleaning and wheel chair transport services

- Long Queues and prolonged waiting time to see the doctor due to increased Doctor-Patients ...ratio

**4. Recommendations / Suggestions to establish good public relations and to enhance the personal development of the team**

Receptionist

Clients who come to the hospital and Out Patient Department form their **initial contact** with the receptionist. Therefore, having good public relations skills is essential for the receptionist. He / she is required to wear his / her **dress** neatly. Recommended dress code should be strictly followed. Receptionist should be courteous and polite. Otherwise, clients get a bad impression about the hospital at their initial contact.

Receptionist should **be aware of the** Out Patient Department as well as **the entire hospital**, because patients and visitors always inquire from the receptionist. Therefore, receptionist should be well informed about everything in the hospital set up.

During one of the surveys done by the marketing department of the hospital, they were able to find out that **the language barrier** is a problem faced by some of the receptionists of the hospital. Therefore, the receptionist is required to be fluent in both Sinhala and English languages, and it is recommended for him / her to be familiar with Tamil language as well. Not only the receptionist, but also the other staff of the Out Patient Department should be **bilingual**, because they have to work with people who speak various languages.

In this case, it is recommended for the hospital management to **arrange a program** to improve **the language proficiency of the staff.** Two Medical Officers of the Out Patient Department are already willing to help the staff members who have the language problem. Hence, if the management conducts such a program to improve language proficiency of the staff, these Medical Officers will volunteer for that program**. In house training programs**

We can recommend the Front Office Manager to monitor the progress of these actions, when those are implemented. And a self evaluation also should be done by the receptionist after a given period of time.

**Nursing Staff**

Nursing staff of the Out Patient Department are **always busy** with the **large number of patients** who come to the department. Since the clients come to seek treatment as out patients, they expect that the staff attend their needs quickly. They do not want to stay in long queues. Therefore, though they are busy, nurses are expected to attend the needs of their patients as soon as possible.

One of the frequent complaints regarding **the nursing staff is the failure to attend the patients quickly.** According to the nursing staff, this is due to their busy work schedule. They have to work long hours and unable to complete all the assigned work with **a minimum number of staff**.

To solve these problems, we make some suggestions related to public relations aspect.

Nurses should **develop more positive attitude** towards their duty and their clients. If the nurses show a positive and warm attitude towards the clients, that is the initial and most important step to develop good public relation skills. Therefore, it is advisable to conduct a separate program / lectures for **the nursing staff regarding customer care** and public relations.

To manage the heavy work load, two options can be suggested. Those are: **increasing the number of nursing staff, and re-organizing the work in the department.** But, it is not very convenient to enroll new staff at this moment. Therefore, the second option should be implemented. We can consider about **delegating the responsibilities within the department**. Daily functions in various areas of the department should be assigned by the Nurse in Charge of the department. Discussions among the nursing staff should be arranged and their opinion should be taken in to consideration.

It is strongly recommended to assign one of **the nursing officers as the Triage Nurse**, so that this nurse can direct the patients to the relevant sections. Then it will be helpful to avoid unnecessary delays and confusions.

The progress of the recommended actions should be monitored by the Nurse in Charge of the Out Patient Department, Section Matron and the Chief Nursing Officer. After a given period of time the process should be evaluated and necessary changes should be done.

Doctors

Doctors are **a vital part** of the Out Patient Department of a hospital. Therefore, the actions of the **doctors are critical in maintaining good public relations in** such a place.

One of the major problems which came to our consideration was **the long waiting** time to see a doctor. Our department has two doctors on duty for each shift. But sometimes when one of the doctors is on leave, the other doctor has to run the shift alone. Therefore, patients has to wait in queues for a long time to see the doctor. As a solution, we suggest the **doctors to arrange another doctor to cover their duty, when he / she is getting a leave.**

Doctors are recommended to follow a proper **dress code** during the duty time. Male doctors are recommended to dress in a long sleeve shirt, tie and a pair of trousers. Sari is recommended for lady doctors.

Doctors are requested to be **punctual** as well. Or else, the other doctors, staff of the unit and the patient have to face unnecessary problems. Therefore, punctuality is highly appreciated.

These recommendations should be discussed with the doctors of the Out Patient Department and necessary changes can be done. Progress of these actions should be monitored and evaluated by the **Chief Medical Officer and the Medical Director.**

Cashiers

Cashiers are another category of the Out Patient Department which has the direct contact with the clients. They are also **required to be polite and courteous as receptionists**. They should be **fluent in Sinhala and English languages** too. And fluency in Tamil language should be beneficial.

Cashiers should always be **ready to explain about the charges** of the treatment and procedures, when the clients ask about them.

The cashiers of this hospital have not been given a specific dress code yet. Therefore it is important to introduce a uniform or a suitable dress code for them. According to the information we have, cashiers of the Out Patient Department of this hospital also willing to use such **a dress code.**

**Punctuality** is essential for the cashiers too. Since they work on shift duties, they have to come to the duty on time. Or else, the other person on duty will face difficulties. Therefore, they should be well informed about this matter.

This process of change should be implemented with the help of the front office staff and should be monitored by **the front office manager and Head of the Finance Department**.

Minor Staff

Minor staff is another important category in this department as well as the entire hospital. They are the people who carry **out the cleaning and transport functions**. Minor staff has to perform an important function in this department as it is a place which is **always crowded with patients** and visitors. Hence it **needs more frequent cleaning**. Not only cleaning, but also patient transport is also to be done frequently. Minor staff has to transport the patients to the wards, radiology and other departments for investigations and to the car park as well. Therefore the service of the minor staff is very important for the functioning of the department.

According to our observations, minor staff should be trained to maintain good public relation skills. They should be given a **training regarding how to deal with clients** and **how to provide a better service for the clients** who come to the Out Patient Department. Not only this, but also a training to face emergency situations such as fire and medical emergencies should be conducted for these staff in order to upgrade the quality of their service.

Minor staff should be encouraged to be **punctual** and **service oriented**. They should be advised to wear the **proper uniform** when they are on duty. Some type of rewards can be introduced to encourage them.

These suggestions should be implemented and monitored with the help of the **Executive Housekeeper and housekeeping supervisors.**

**5. Further steps**

This public relations plan does not end with the above mentioned actions which have been suggested to upgrade the staff members of the Out Patient Department. It has to continue further in order to improve the quality of other areas of public relations such as environment of the hospital, safety, other facilities provided and media relations. Therefore, marketing department is expected to continue this program to cover those areas as well.

The progress of the plan should be continuously monitored by responsible personnel. Changes of the program should be done accordingly.

It is necessary to develop a proper method to make sure whether we meet our goals at the end of the given period of time.

**6. Conclusion**

In this paper, we discussed about planning a public relations program for a team of staff members the Out Patient Department of the Lanka Hospital, Colombo. This program is aimed on the personal development of the team consisting receptionist, nurses, doctors, cashiers and minor staff.

We planned the program as a practical one which can be implemented in the department easily. Our objectives were; to increase the quality of service of the staff, to reduce the number of complaints regarding the customer care, and to increase the revenue of the hospital which is getting through the Out Patient Department by 50% within next six months. In order to achieve these objectives we suggested a comprehensive plan which should be implemented with the help of our resource personnel.

Then we made some recommendations to upgrade each and every individual staff member in the department. Each category of the staff has to improve various aspect of their service in order to provide a quality care for our clients.

Not only this, but also we recommended the responsible officers to conduct continuous monitoring and evaluation of the progress of this program. Necessary changes can be done according to the results obtained.

Most important thing about this plan is; it should be implemented by all of the staff. Everyone has a special part to do. Everyone should attempt to upgrade their quality and all of them should work together in order to provide a quality care for the client. If we can work like this we will be able achieve our goals easily.

(2582 words)

**7. References**