

Skill Induction Training in Professionalizing People in Front Office Operations at Super Specialty Hospitals - A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Front office operations are hospital administration wing and are a vital component of every super-specialty hospital. A well-structured team of front office executives is heart and soul behind its operations. They continuously coordinate between every department of hospitals on daily basis and are responsible for planning to coordinate and oversee the smooth functioning of hospitals. They are the first point of contact for all patients and as such, it is very critical for super-specialty hospitals to groom and provide training continuously to aid to patients' satisfaction levels. Training programs offered by hospitals must be associated with quality service delivery to improve the productivity of people both at the front end and back end which becomes critically essential for the quality of work that they offer. The paper focuses on formulating skill induction training programs for front office staff in super-specialty hospitals. It stresses the importance of why medical Healthcare forces go through regular training programs to comply with accrediting standards of patient safety. The results have enabled us to mark out the knowledge base to fill in followed by soft skills needed to address patients and would facilitate change in the attitude of the staff to cater to the standardized needs of the super specialty hospitals. It will ensure to improve the people who are the face of the hospital known for meeting patient needs.

Index Terms—Front office, Patient Satisfaction, Super Specialty.

I. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Training is a process which grants the workers information, skills and enables them to understand the organization and its objectives (Bhardwaj,2000)^[1]. Every organization has need for trained and experienced people in order to effectively perform their activities. The Tasks on today's organizations have become complex, and the importance of educating employees has grown hence the emphasis on training has rapidly increased over years.

Training in this context of the super specialty hospitals refers to updated knowledge or skills or facilitation exercise which will enable a person working in specialized hospital to perform effectively.

The Front office is term used for Reception area at hospitals. This is the first point of contact for patients. Front office operations are important segment of hospital administration wing and are a vital component of every super-specialty hospital. Front desk representatives are the face, just as quite possibly the main branches of an inn and their exhibition is integral to customers' initial introductions of the inn. (Yuchao Shao 2017)^[2]. Besides, timely introduction and registration process of patients will influence their perception towards the hospitals.

A well-structured team of front office executives are heart and soul behind its operations. They continuously coordinate between every department of hospitals on daily basis and are responsible for planning and coordinating to oversee the smooth functioning of hospitals. Reception is the first point of contact for all patients and as such, it is very critical for super-specialty hospitals to groom and provide training continuously to aid to patient's satisfaction levels. Training programmes offered by hospitals must be associated with quality service delivery to improve the productivity of people both at the front end and back end which becomes critically essential for the quality of work that they offer.

The hospitals have to continuously focus on Developing and strengthening the knowledge, skill and abilities of front desk in order to meet the objective of providing quality services to patients. The training modules formulated for this group should focus on combination of on the job and off the job training programs in order to meet the

ever-changing demands of the super specialty hospitals.

As the dynamics of Technology and Patient care is ever changing. The front office should be trained periodically to fill the gaps created in their day-to-day work and their Training needs should incorporate the confluence of individual learning along with meeting the objectives of hospitals in order to make learning process more effective.

II. RESEARCH GAP

The people at Front office are centrifugal point in any hospital as they are required to continuously coordinate with all the departments to run the operations smoothly. The regular work is multidimensional from Greeting the patients graciously Scheduling and appointments, Handling admission and discharge process, Patient communication, Handle patient complaints, medical claim, medical records to email and fax the documents, adding to this Communication and great patient service skills will aid to better patient satisfaction so hospitals regularly train their front office executives with specified skill set to handle above mentioned day to day routines.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To identify and assess the training needs of the front office staff at Super Specialty Hospitals.
2. To formulate the training module for the Front office staff in the Super Specialty Hospitals.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- The Research conducted in this study is descriptive and explanatory in nature, as it focuses on Identifying skills that needed for front office officials at super specialty hospitals.
- The study was conducted at seven super specialty hospitals at Bengaluru and the hospitals considered for the study are Fortis Hospital, Apollo Hospital, and Sparsh group of hospitals, Columbia Asia hospital, Manipal group of hospitals, Narayana chain of hospitals and Aster group of hospitals
- The population of the study are, people working in The Training Department of Super Specialty Hospitals, because this department takes every opportunity to expand knowledge for all employees. It's vital for any hospital to have a structured training programme for timely achievement of organizational objectives and to deliver quality patient care by meeting international standards. The Entire List of Training program conducted in these super specialty hospitals are collected to assess the skills needed for Front office Executives.
- The present study used the purposive sampling method to collect the data. This method is deemed as appropriate because the purpose of the present study is not to provide point and interval estimates of the variables, but to explore the relationships among the variables (Espinoza, 1999) ^[3]. The other sampling methods are less feasible in the context of hospitals where the respondents are people from Training Department. Both Primary and Secondary data were used to collect the data.
- In depth interviews were conducted at these super specialty hospitals to obtain information on skills that are essential for front office officials in order to provide quality services to patients. The Training Department including Content developers, Supervisors, Coordinators and Trainers were interviewed to capture the needs of training programme to be delivered for front office officials and skill set needed was captured from the same.
- Secondary data were collected from Research papers, Articles, websites and Books

V. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- a. This study cannot provide conclusive approach as it restricts data collection only from seven super specialty hospitals.
- b. Front office executives could not be interviewed or contacted for data collection purpose due to COVID Protocols

VI. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION.

Training needs assessed for Front office officials by super specialty hospitals

Patient is always Right

Even if the patient is not right, it's the medical staff's responsibility to make the patient feel that they are right and treat as per their reaction. None of the patients should feel that they were ignored, as all the patients seek attention

when Sick. If the patients are not given due importance they will ensure to get to a hospital where he or she can get more attention and care.

Be Pleasant and Smile

Appearing Pleasant and smiling is a small gesture, but its mandatory for front office employees in a hospital, in a recent study it is noted that 42% of the patients have left due to employees being rude or not helping them. Hospitals who have received negative feedback about experienced staff who does not smile and are careless at work, should treat this kind of behavior as not acceptable norm in medical industry and should be used in training sessions to correct them.

Patient Care

Everyone in the hospital should know what patient care is, the hospitals which trains its employees to show concern towards patients will become a great ambassador of this concept and also will be able to create a great relationship with the patients. The front office employees should be trained to smile and greet patients well, the staff should always listen to the patient's problems and need to have a good attitude of listening to the patients and respond to them as per the issue.

Being Professional

The front office staff should always be polite and stay calm. The staff should not become angry or irritated if the patient is very adamant and demanding. In all situations staff should win patient's heart and ensure that they come back to the same place for treatment. Also, they should recommend the hospital for their friends and family and always ensure that the patient's visit to the hospital was good and they should feel like coming back.

Positive attitude

The Front office staff should be positive and proactively diplomatic with the patient even if they don't want to be, this is very important on bad days where they get a very angry and an aggressive patient. So, because of one bad patient's behavior the staff should not take this on other patients and should not show any arrogance. Any negative reaction can close the door to the patient and can open another medical firm's door, its Staff's due diligence to provide amazing customer service.

Patient Communication

When a personal touch is shown to the patients it will be remembered for a longer time, The Front office staff should know the Patient's name so that when they interact with them, they would feel recognized and happy. Also, regular conversation before any treatment will help the patient build the trust with the hospital Staff, all these things will help build a great reputation with the patient and as time lapses patient will have a great mind-set about the staff as they were taken care very well.

Going Extra Mile

Front office staff should be trained on how to go extra mile and if they do, how can one win patient's trust. Staff should know how to make the patient happy by doing more than the requirement to gain the patient's trust, even if they don't know what to answer to the patient, they should be in position to get the answer and also be confident while talking.

Top skill set needed for Front Office Staff in Super Specialty Hospital that were identified during the interview and Training Programs are formulated for this skill set

Professional Appearance

Grooming and Professional appearance is the essential part of Front desk at super specialty hospitals. They have to be trained to appear tidy and pleasant and they must abide by grooming protocols set by the hospitals (Brushing hair, polishing their shoes, tidy uniforms). As they represent the hospital as first point of contact, hospitals should be training them on reflecting the values of the hospitals through their behavior.

Front Office Communication

Healthy communication is the essential part of smooth functioning of any hospital. So Front office officials have to learn the knack of being able to communicate the right thing at a right time and in a right way. The communication network at this platform is multidimensional as it requires effective coordination between different departments of the hospitals and their core segment of communication lies in the area of patient communication, where they are trained to interact in a kind and empathetic manner with patients and their relatives and also assure them of necessary attention and treatment that can be provided by the hospitals. They should also be able to explain the policies of the hospitals with utmost clarity and politeness.

Writing Skills

Written communication is an important skill for front office executive. They need to learn to answer the queries effectively through emails and other forms of written communication (Business documents, memos) and for learning the same, the logic they need to be trained on is ABC Principle- Accuracy of Communication that is being factually correct and also equip sense of grammar in their writing, B is Brevity where they summarize the communication without dumping too much of information and C is clarity focuses on being specific about the goal and message to be passed on to patients and other departments of hospitals.

Listening Skills

Listening skills are important tool for front office officials which goes beyond just lending an ear. They need to pay attention to patient queries and they have to be attentive to understand the nature of the discussion and revert with suitable response to cater to needs of the patient.

Emotional responses should usually be avoided at the front desk, they must concentrate on the main content without getting distracted and give patient the hope and support of confiding in them without any prior Judgement.

Appointment Scheduling Process

Appointment scheduling process is an essential skill that one must learn in order to plan and organize patients' appointments and Procedures depending on the availability of Doctors and OT Rooms. Streamlining the appointment process and facilitating the patients' appointments on time increases the satisfaction level of patients. So, a Prior booking which is planned, coordinated well and effectively delivered is a requisite for front office officials.

Technology today is also eased the Scheduling process with presence of Digital platforms (Practo, Mfine) and software's and they should be trained to operate on these platforms.

Problem Solving Skills

Problem solving skills are important to front office executives because it's the first point of contact that patient tries to reach out to when they are encountered with query or grievance. These issues could be minor or major in nature. Irrespective of magnitude of the issue, these executives are trained to solve the issue by applying their analytical skills. Trouble shooting and Resolving Complaints should be their top most priority, in order cater quality services to patients and if these issues are addressed with prompt response and challenges are combated with creativity, the hospitals will be able to provide good experience to patients and can in turn earn good review for it despite a tricky and difficult situation.

Interpersonal Skills - Interpersonal skills are important skill that are required for front office executive's that goes beyond basic communication skills. They should be able to initiate small talks, collaborate well with all the departments effectively and should be trained to receive feedbacks from patients with utmost grace. Qualities like Friendliness and Likeability will help them handle any situation with logic and maturity. Good Interpersonal skills will enable them to connect with patients and diverse background and it will leave positive impact on the services provided by the hospital.

Multitasking Skills

The front office professionals should be equipped to juggle between multiple situations that arise in hospitals on day-to-day basis. They should be simultaneously be able to handle calls, Screen callers, and handle patients face to face and also should assist administrative staff with regular work flow. They should be adept enough to coordinate with back office and Insurance agents when it's required to address the needs of patients.

Telephone Skills

Telephone skills are important etiquette that every hospital should train their front office staff with. They should be trained to be very courteous and polite while answering the calls, they are trained to answer the calls in 3 rings in order reflect responsiveness showed by them to attend the queries of patients and connect them to concerned departments. The methodology practiced in this training are MAGIC. Make Connect with the patients with clear and prompt response, show positivity in the tone to win their confidence, get to the point to be addressed, Interpret the facts to solve their queries with quick action and always aim at Customer excellence (Patient satisfaction) disconnect the call only after the entire query has been addressed.

Time Management Skills

The front office staff should always be trained to be quick in their response while addressing patients in order to meet their needs within time. Time is a very crucial factor in the case of patients whose health is deteriorating and needs immediate attention, so front office staff should be on their feet to coordinate with the required department for their timely treatment. So, over all time management also helps them reduce overcrowding at the reception.

Knowledge driven skills

Proficiency in medical terminologies - Getting acquainted with medical terminologies will always contribute to efficient functioning of front office executives. It will help them to answer the queries of patients better and understand the gravity of the condition of patient's diseases and also, they will be able to understand the clinical information to be collected by each department of the hospitals and communicate the same to patient in simple language. Knowledge on Medical terms will always give an advantage in them being updated about procedures, Treatment and medications being provided to patients.

Report and Documentation Skills

Report and Documentation skills are vital skill set that are required for front office executives in hospitals. Right Documentation skills leads to building of a good knowledge repository that entire hospital depends on. This repository usually composes of patient records, Patient interactions, Procedure details, medical orders, Treatment details, Admission and Discharge summary, Referrals, Individual records, staff records. Since the entire services delivered to patient depends on Robust Report and documentation skills, they need to focus on updating this on a regular basis.

Negotiation Skills

The operations of Front office is very complex due to its multidimensional approach, so they need to equip negotiation skills which is an essential tool to resolve the conflicts that arises and they should be in positions to solve the problems with win-win approach in order to keep the patients happy.

Stress Management Skills

Working in hospitals exposes you to highly demanding situations and they get to meet patients with different temperaments laced with pain and suffering. In order face these situations front office executives should be trained conceal their emotions and not throw their frustrations at patients and also techniques manage emotions under stress.

Technical Skills

Computer Literacy is a very competent skill set that front office people should be equipped with. With advent of technology most of process at front office has gone digital so they should be effectively be able to manage Human Resources Information system of hospitals. They should be trained to access patient related information digitally to solve any queries related to patients. Each hospital uses its own set of software's to manage regular work flow and they need to proficient at these software's to adhere to general work flow. The Admission and Discharge procedures along with billing has become digitized today, so they should well be acquainted with operating this softwares.

VII. DISCUSSIONS

This study is focused on finding out why front office, in superspeciality hospitals are important, it was found that due to its multidimensional approach this area is being considered as centrifugal point

- The Training Departments undertake the Training need analysis for front office officials once every quarter to capture the gap arised in training and its application in terms of work they do.
- Training content is formulated on Patient Feedback, Opinions of Front office executive's day to day scenario and industry expectations
- Training skills are imparted through combination of on and off the Job Training programmes once in every quarter.
- The Skill set identified for Front office staff were combination of soft skills and technical skills.

CONCLUSION

The above study shows that when Front Office Department is trained periodically in super specialty hospitals, they become the key promoters for patient satisfaction. Since it's the most important hub for any hospitals for facing diverse patients on day-to-day basis. It becomes vital for them understand the queries of patients with utmost dignity and grace. The skills that they bank on for addressing the queries of patients are soft skills. (Communication skills, Negotiation skills, listening skills, Problem solving skills, Stress management skills, Leadership skills). Training modules has to be formulated with giving these skills a priority to attain patient satisfaction.

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