

Post Hospital Communication between Health Professionals

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to review the available research studies on the subject of interprofessional communication between health providers post hospitalization. The Australian healthcare system faces numerous challenges in form of difficulties that patients face in accessing post-hospital care and inefficient communication amongst healthcare professionals is one of them. For this paper, specific search terms were used in the Google Scholar search engine and the results were shortlisted according to the year of publication. From the review of the available studies on the subject, it was highlighted that efficient and effective communication between healthcare providers was crucial for the safety and health of post hospital patients. Various authors have talked about how communication and collaboration between various healthcare providers post hospital are important. Inefficiencies in written communication between healthcare providers have been listed by authors. Researchers have also talked about the importance of timeliness of communication between healthcare providers in a post hospital setting. It was also found that lack of centralization of healthcare delivery systems also results in failure of communication between healthcare professionals, especially in a post hospital setting.

Keywords: Health Professionals, Post Hospital Communication, Review

Introduction

The Australian healthcare system faces some challenges in form of difficulties that patients face in accessing post-hospital care. In Australia, post-hospital care is hard for patients, and this can be associated with various factors such as the referral system being inefficient, the patient being uninformed about his treatment plan, and ineffective communication among health professionals involved in patient cases. There is evidence that there is a lack of coordination and effective communication among the various health professionals involved in individual patient cases. As a result, the paper aims to review the literature concerning the communication among health professionals in the Australian healthcare system.

Methodology

In this paper, we will review some of the research studies which have been carried out on the subject of interprofessional communication between healthcare providers in a post hospital setting. Towards this end, specific search terms were used in Google Scholar search engine, such as “healthcare + communication”, “post hospital + communication”, and “health providers + communication + collaboration”. The results of these searches were shortlisted as per the year of publication. For the purpose of this study, only studies published after 2012 were used, in order to examine the phenomenon of interprofessional communication between healthcare providers in a post hospital setting.

Results and Discussion

Effective and efficient communication is crucial in healthcare. The patient’s safety and health depend upon efficient communication between various healthcare providers. According to

Foronda, MacWilliams, & McArthur (2016), the link between miscommunication and poor patient outcomes has been well documented.

Essential Communication

According to Verhaegh, Seller-Boersma, Simons, Steenbruggen, Geerlings, de Rooij, and Burman (2017), interprofessional communication and collaboration during hospitalization is critically important to provide safe and effective care. But such communication is essential not just during hospitalization but also post hospitalization. Oliver-Baxter and Bywood (2013) suggested that communication between health professionals is essential not only for primary care but also post-hospital care. An analysis of the issue that has been a concern for years indicated that the integration of health services could not be achieved without adequate communication between health professionals (Oliver-Baxter & Bywood, 2013). As such, the World Health Organisation defined the integration of health services as the act of bringing together functions that are common between and within organisations to solve the problems that may be common through shared vision, goals, and communication strategies (Wang et al., 2017, p.81). There have been instances when patient's post-hospital care requiring the integration of services and effective communication among the healthcare professionals, were not met efficiently, resulting in service delivery delays and inefficiency in promoting patient health (Oliver-Baxter & Bywood, 2013). The communication problem was identified through the need for the patient to get referrals from the GP to see the specialist, an orthopedic surgeon, who assessed the patient's progress. As such, Oliver-Baxter and Bywood (2013) suggested that effective communication helps in the promotion of patient outcomes to prevent adverse issues such as the feeling of being interrogated as a patient.

In an integrative literature review conducted by Wang et al. (2017, p.82), effective communication between health professionals promotes high-quality care for the patient during post-hospital services as well as primary care. Based on the review, health professionals need to practice effective communication for the best of their patients to ensure that they receive quality care. O'Daniel and Rosenstein (2018) also asserted that effective communication in healthcare promotes collaboration and teamwork which helps to improve patient care. There have been cases which show that the Australian healthcare system faces a significant challenge in the collaboration of health professionals due to the ineffective communication regarding their patients. Outpatients have to go to their GPs for referrals and issues associated with insurances which indicates the deficiency of collaboration in the system. As such, Wang et al. (2017, p.84) suggested that communication between health professionals is essential as it promotes accuracy, efficiency, and delivery of quality care to the patients. Therefore, Dingley, Daugherty, and Mary (n.d.) suggested the need for enhancements in communication strategies to improve the quality of care for the patients. As such, effective communication between health professionals ensures quality care and patient satisfaction during primary and post-hospital care.

Uncentralized Services

Due to the lack of centralization of services, proper communication between relevant healthcare providers cannot take place in a post hospital setting. In a study, Coiera (2016, p.89) found that patient is involved with different health professionals and individuals with the aim of promoting patient's health and quality of life. In most cases, the different individuals need to share patient information and discuss the appropriate management of the patient's condition. Effective communication, therefore, is critical for adequate support of health services rendered to patients

at any stage of their care (Coiera, 2016, p.90). For patients in need of post-hospital care in Australia, the effective communication between health professionals may be difficult as the services are not centralised and patients may need to seek services across the public and private hospitals where the specialists are available (Sawmynaden, Atherton, Sheikh, Car & Majeed, 2013). Although Dingley, Daugherty, and Mary (n.d.) found that communication strategy enhancements were critical for the improvement of collaboration between health professionals, this may not be the case in Australia as some of the specialists have to work in both private and public hospitals.

Communication Technologies

The use of communication technologies in the field of medicine has eased the delivery of healthcare to patients. But, despite the communication technologies that support the delivery of health services to patients, Toussaint and Coiera (2015, p.779) argued that it is the health professionals who have to take the initiative of engaging one another through technologies such as emails. However, in some cases, communication between the health professionals is only evident when giving referrals for the patient. As such, Coiera (2016, p.89) supports the need for the health professionals to communicate effectively for the benefit of the patient.

Similarly, Dixit. and Sambasivan (2018) reviewed the Australian healthcare system and established that patient outcomes and performance improvements are primary problems associated with ineffective communication during the process of providing care to the patients. Although the review did not address the issue to affect post-hospital care specifically, it is apparent that some improvements in communication are needed to ensure that health professionals work together adequately. According to Mark, Toussaint and Coiera (2015, p.780), it is critical for effective communication to be part of the patient care process for all the health professionals to have the right patient information and make contributions regarding the management of the patient. Interdisciplinary teams involved in post-hospital care where the patient has to access services from different health professionals requires effective communication strategies to promote patient satisfaction and outcomes (Sawmynaden et al., 2013). Coiera (2016, p.89) found that ineffective communication resulted in poor service delivery and patient outcomes and satisfaction were also detrimentally affected. It can be argued that the Australian health care system requires the implementation of effective communication strategies between health professionals for the integration of health services with common goals (Oliver-Baxter & Bywood, 2013). Therefore, communication between health professionals is critical for the improvement of patient outcomes and performance which are issues of concern in the Australian healthcare system.

Hesselink *et al.* (2013, p.i40) conducted another study that assessed whether patients are discharged with care which illustrates post-hospital care for discharged patients. In the Australian healthcare system, Dixit. and Sambasivan (2018) suggested that patient-centered care is promoted during hospitalisation, but various barriers are faced during the discharge process where patient-centered care is not adequately addressed. During the post-hospital care, Hesselink *et al.* (2013, p. i40) argued that health professionals do not effectively engage in consultations regarding patient's health condition which may result in problems during the transition as outpatients. Also, Hesselink *et al.* (2013, p. i40) found that communication during post-hospital care is impaired and the decision-making process may impact the patients adversely as they may feel like they are not ready for the post-hospital services which increase fear and anxiety about recovery. In such cases, Hesselink *et al.* (2013, p. i42) noted that the GP should effectively

communicate with the specialists to ensure that the patient's issues are addressed adequately. However, Dixit. and Sambasivan (2018) implied that ineffective communication between health professionals is one of the critical aspects that affect patient outcomes and performance during the process of patient care. Therefore, Coiera (2016, p.90) noted that effective communication between health professionals is the key to improves patient care and post-hospital service delivery.

Patient Safety

Wang *et al.* (2017, p.84) showed that communication between health professionals is a key factor in the improvement of patient safety during hospital and post-hospital care. Communication in healthcare is critical to the promotion of patient safety, and post-hospital care is not exceptional. According to O'Daniel and Rosenstein (2018), patient-centered care should be provided throughout the course of care. As such, patient-centered care should also be factored into the post-hospital care, and this cannot be achieved without effective communication between the health professionals (Sawmynaden et al., 2013). Effective communication, in this case, ensures the coordination of the various services required for the recovery of the patient. In some cases, when the patient required rehabilitation, specialist services, and general checkups which were needed to be coordinated for the identification of the best services for the patient, due to ineffective communication strategies, the patient did not receive adequate post-hospital care as he had to move from one professional to another with only the GP giving referrals and dealing with his paperwork. As such, Dingley, Daugherty, and Mary (n.d.) argued that effective communication between the health professionals would yield patient-centered care and improved patient outcomes and satisfaction.

In conclusion, research supports the need for effective communication strategies between health professionals for the improvement of patient-centeredness, satisfaction, and outcomes. While different studies were conducted regarding the role of communication in healthcare, the findings were supportive of the need for the healthcare professionals to collaborate with each other for the best interests of the patients during post-hospital care. As such, effective communication in any healthcare system promotes patient safety and coordination of care through effective decision-making strategies. Also, studies have indicated that effective communication promotes the integration of services in healthcare to promote patient experience and the recovery process. A review of the Australian healthcare system indicated that improvement of patient outcomes and performance were issues of concern and communication is a critical factor associated with the problem. Therefore, the improvement of communication between health professionals would go a long way to improve post-hospital care.

Inefficiencies in Written Communication

Inefficient communication, especially written communication can have a negative impact on the health of the patient, especially in post hospital settings. According to Vermeir, Degroote, Peleman, Verhaeghe, et al. (2015), there is a large body of literature on inefficiencies in written communication. Cross-sectional studies, performed in different countries and settings, show a unequivocal concordance in both perceptions of the ideal content of written communication and its current inefficiencies. The study by Vermeir, Degroote, Peleman, Verhaeghe, et al. (2015) says that general practitioners and specialists disagree about the quality of their mutual communication. Specialists mention GPs' referral letters to lack information. Furthermore, they feel that GPs insufficiently follow their specialist advice. GPs in turn mention that many of their

questions are insufficiently addressed by the specialists. The readability level of letters was another issue raised. Reasons for the poor content of written communication are also multifactorial: a lack of time to create notes, GPs maybe do not make a full assessment of the problems, GPs and specialists may use a different point of view, they may consider letters to have different goals (e.g. a tool for information transfer vs. archiving) etc. (Vermeir, Degroote, Peleman, Verhaeghe, et al., 2015).

Timeliness of Communication

In order to be effective, interprofessional communication in healthcare settings also needs to be timely. According to Vermeir, Degroote, Peleman, Verhaeghe, et al. (2015), a considerable number of studies assessed timeliness of communication, either the subjective perception or real delays. It is clear that timeliness is a significant contributor to communication efficiency for all stakeholders. Timeliness of communication is a frequently reported problem by patients. It is evident that information on prior events can influence current decisions on the patient's care and that the lack or incompleteness of such information can lead to (potentially) preventable adverse events and subsequent patient harm. As well, poor communication often causes several types of delays, such as in consultation response or acceptance of a referral, in diagnoses and treatment (Vermeir, Degroote, Peleman, Verhaeghe, et al., 2015). As a consequence, patient safety may be compromised when the right information is not available to the right person at the right time.

According to Vermeir, Degroote, Peleman, Verhaeghe, et al. (2015), for healthcare providers, poor communication leads to additional workload as it decreases confidence in decisions. Last, patients can be confronted with having to repeat their stories, double tests, treatment delays and can receive conflicting information, which, in turn, may lead to decreased patient confidence and satisfaction. Several of these mechanisms additionally imply increased, unnecessary and avoidable costs, e.g. because of unnecessary repeat investigation.

Economic Impact of Communication Inefficiencies

Inefficient communication between healthcare providers has a definite economic impact, especially in post hospital settings. According to Vermeir, Degroote, Peleman, Verhaeghe, et al. (2015), although healthcare providers spend a significant amount of their time in communication, studies trying to quantify the economic impact of communication inefficiencies are very scarce. Literature provides numerous examples of outcomes of poor communication with an economic impact. First, it leads to avoidable hospital admissions and readmissions. Interventions to improve communication and coordination have been found to reduce hospital admissions.

Hierarchies

There is evidence that hierarchies in healthcare settings impede the interprofessional communication between healthcare providers. Rice et al. (2010) identified that interprofessional hierarchies had substantial negative effects on communication and collaboration with healthcare providers on a general internal medicine unit (as cited in Foronda, MacWilliams, & McArthur, 2016). Hierarchies in healthcare settings have the potential to negatively impact the interprofessional communication between healthcare providers and hence, it may, in turn, impact the health of patients negatively. In the study by Rice et al. (2010), physicians stated they were used to having their orders carried out without discussion or negotiation and that interprofessional communication was "rare and impersonal" (as cited in Foronda, MacWilliams, & McArthur, 2016). Similarly, Woodhall et al. (2008) found that physicians had reservations

about nurses giving recommendations prior to the physician's examination of the patient (as cited in Foronda, MacWilliams, & McArthur, 2016).

Readmissions

As per the study by Bingham, Campbell, Schussel et al. (2019), approximately one in five patients are readmitted post-hospitalization. Hospital readmissions are connected to worsened health outcomes for patients and increased healthcare expenditures. While some readmissions are unavoidable, research suggests that collaborative activities including enhanced patient education, coordination with post-acute care outpatient providers, and reducing medical complications during the patients' initial hospital stays can prevent readmissions Bingham, Campbell, Schussel et al. (2019). Hence, some of the readmissions can be avoided by improving coordination with post hospital outpatient health providers.

Conclusion

This paper aimed at reviewing the available research studies on the subject of interprofessional communication between health providers post hospitalization. The Australian healthcare system is characterized by numerous challenges in form of difficulties that patients face in accessing post-hospital care and inefficient communication amongst healthcare professionals is one of them. From this paper, it was highlighted that efficient and effective communication between healthcare providers was crucial for the safety and health of post hospital patients. Various authors have talked about how communication and collaboration between various healthcare providers post hospital are important. Inefficiencies in written communication between healthcare providers have been listed by authors. Authors talk about healthcare system hierarchies which impede in efficient communication between healthcare providers. Researchers have also talked about the importance of timeliness of communication between healthcare providers in a post hospital setting. It was also found that lack of centralization of healthcare delivery systems also results in failure of communication between healthcare professionals, especially in a post hospital setting.

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