

Patient Safety and Employee Word-of-Mouth Communication: An Abstract

Soumya Upadhyay and Thomas L. Powers

Abstract In this paper a framework for marketing patient safety through positive employee word-of-mouth is developed. The culture of patient safety is an important aspect of hospital quality (Cohen, Eustis, & Gribbins, 2003). In the extant literature employee involvement has not been discussed as a factor that may influence the culture of safety. Employees who believe in the integrity of their organization are much more likely to recommend it via word of mouth (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997). It follows that this relationship may extend to other areas that include the promotion of patient safety. This may involve employee communication to both patients and other publics. The importance of interpersonal relationships between front-line personnel and customers is documented in the literature (Beatty et al., 1996; Price & Arnould, 1999) and can lead to improving customer perceptions and satisfaction (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997). This personal bond may be more important in services as they are more difficult to convey to customers. In particular, healthcare services are difficult for customers to comprehend, and thus communication from employees may promote the quality of a healthcare service better than traditional advertising or promotional methods (Erdem & Swait, 1998).

Word-of-mouth communication (WOM) is well documented in the literature and is defined as an oral, person-to-person communication that the receiver recognizes as noncommercial (Buttle, 1998). It has been shown that WOM communication can be more influential on behavior than other communication forms due to source credibility (Day, 1971; Herr et al., 1991; Sheth, 1971). It also has been shown that customers that are influenced by positive WOM may provide WOM referrals to others (Coțiu et al., 2014; Drevs & Hinz, 2014). The notion of employee involvement and patient safety represents an extension of the WOM literature; however, there is no reason to believe that in this context it performs any differently. It is hypothesized

S. Upadhyay (✉) • T.L. Powers
University of Alabama at Birmingham, Birmingham, AL, USA
e-mail: supad@uab.edu; tpowers@uab.edu

to have a positive effect on the perception of patient safety, in the same manner that is has been documented to positively influence other forms of customer perceptions (Ennew et al., 2000; Kim & Gupta, 2012). Findings from this study will enable hospital managers to implement WOM communication as a marketing tool that can improve patient safety perceptions.

References Available Upon Request