The Importance of Soft Skills in The Improvement of The Work of Employees in Healthcare Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Unlike hard, basic skills that are already learned, soft skills are similar to emotions or represent an insight that allows people to “read” others. These skills are harder to learn, at least in a traditional classroom and are much more difficult to measure and rate. Soft socializing skills include adaptability, attitude, communication, creative thinking, work ethic, teamwork, networking, decision making, positivity, time management, motivation, flexibility, problem solving, critical thinking and conflict resolution. Healthcare workers that are in constant contact with people - patients should possess a variety of the aforementioned soft socialization skills as most of the patients are in poor health condition and often frightened, stressed and confused, so healthcare worker needs to know to respond appropriately to the patient’s needs, which is a key part of maintaining health. Healthcare workers are also in constant contact with other healthcare workers so they need to behave with them appropriately in order to have more successful work and better medical care. This scientific paper includes research for the importance of soft skills in the improvement of the work of healthcare workers. Thanks to survey responses, it can be concluded that the majority of healthcare workers believe that soft socializing skills are just as important as firm basic skills for delivering good health care.

Key words: soft skills–socializing skills–communication skills–emotional intelligence–healthcare workers

1 INTRODUCTION

Hard skills are the technical knowledge needed to perform a particular job. These skills represent a cumulative product of experience, practice and knowledge gained. Basic skills represent visible skills that can be measured in order to determine if a person is competent for a particular position. The easiest way to memorize these skills is to take them as easily demonstrable skills.

Typical examples of such skills:
- a plumber to know how to set up a water supply system;
- a mechanical engineer to be able to examine mechanical obstacles or unexpected problems during maintenance;
- a medical specialist to be able to assess the patient’s illness in order to determine the appropriate medical procedure;

Soft skills are non-technical skills that allow us to manage ourselves and communicate with others in a positive way. These skills are very difficult to measure and prove. Soft skills include communication skills, leadership skills, emotional intelligence, teamwork skills, management skills, knowledge management, etc. [1]

Mutual communication is not simple at all but when it comes to communication with patients, the situation gets even more difficult. Quality service is the central place in all missions of every healthcare organization, in other words, it means that “the patient is in the focus of their interest”. [2]

The field of communication, especially business communication is very broad and includes many different forms of communication. We distinguish two forms of communication: verbal and non-verbal communication. Verbal communication includes two forms of communication: voice communication and written communication. Despite verbal, its place and significance in the business world has non-verbal communication, known as “body language”. According to some researches, 75% or even 80% of communication is non-verbal. Non-verbal communication is the way people communicate with each other without words, whether intentional or unintentional. Non-verbal communication is used to express emotions, opinion, to maintain personality, to instigate or change verbal communication. This kind of communication is performed with signs: facial expressions,
voice tone, gestures, body posture, movement, contact and glance. Non-verbal communication is very important for the patient since such communication affects the health outcome, as it is the adherence to therapy, patient’s recovery and the like.

It is very important to possess skills and ability to communicate with others and to establish good interpersonal relationships. All of it ensures clear communication and efficient handling in conflict situations. [3] Also, it is very important to show confidence and respect for the interlocutors. We use the interpersonal skills on a daily basis, when communicating with other people, individually and in groups. People that possess strong interpersonal skills are often more successful on a professional and personal level. [4] It is very important to mention that interpersonal skills include a wide range of abilities, although most stressed is communication - such as listening, questioning and understanding of the body language, these skills include abilities and attributes related to emotional intelligence, or ability to understand and manage your own or the emotions of others.

The ability to establish good interpersonal relationships derives from the emotional intelligence, which contrary to other traditional concepts of intelligence is not treated as purely cognitive but refers to skills that help deal with work and everyday living. Emotional intelligence is the part that is "untouchable in every person", but affects the behaviour of the person and the decision making that leads to success on a professional and personal basis. [5]

People with higher emotional intelligence are communicative, influential, enjoy confidence and respect, they are motivated, dedicated and creative. Soft skills refer to other people’s interpersonal intelligence, while emotional intelligence except this one includes and intra-personal intelligence too, which is self-knowledge and presents something a person needs to possess to be able to understand others. [6]

Most of the mistakes in medicine are due to a lack of communication and effective teamwork. Although healthcare workers are usually part of the coordination and management team for patients’ care, they are not trained with skills such as communication, situational understanding, decision making and teamwork. All of the previously mentioned can lead to patients’ safety incidents and medical lapses. These teams represent a collaborative unit of people working together to achieve a common goal. Working in a team requires trust, focus and belief in the final goal, more research and less conflicts. These are the five key things for a productive team: positive interdependence, individual responsibility, promotional interaction, proper use of social skills and teamwork.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Health as a topic is a wide area and the research of all the segments of health care is always topical and engaging. There are imperfections in all fields, both professionally (medically) and technically. On a worldwide level health is always moving forward and improving. Health facilities become more modern, the equipment too, but most important is that the stuff is improving, ie the doctors.

Becoming a good doctor is a long educational process, starting with faculty, specialization, sub-specialization and constant formal and informal education. But despite these basic skills known as hard skills, doctors should also possess the so-called soft, social skills in order to improve health services and patients' satisfaction.

Topic of this research was the importance of soft skills in the improvement of the work of healthcare staff, ie enhancement of health services through improved interpersonal relationships. Today more attention is paid to soft socializing skills, so they became part of every area, especially in medicine and are key to a positive outcome among patients.

In order to achieve the aim of this research conducted was a survey which included 116 doctors, with and without specialization, employed in several state and private health facilities. The survey consists of 10 questions with answers: Yes, Partly, I do not know and No, all regarding soft socializing skills.

2.1 Empirical Research
On the question “Are you, as a doctor, familiar with soft socializing skills besides the basic hard skills?”, out of 116 respondents, 43% answered "Yes", 41% "Partly", 12% "I don’t know" and 4% "No", indicating that most of the doctors are familiar with socializing soft skills.

Grafikon 1 - "Are you, as a doctor, familiar with soft socializing skills besides the basic hard skills?"

On the question “Do you think that doctors should possess soft socializing skills?”, out of 116 respondents, 62% answered "Yes", 24% "Partly" and 14% "I don’t know", while no one said “No”, indicating that most of the doctors agree that they should possess these skills.

Grafikon 2 - "Do you think that doctors should possess soft socializing skills?"

On the question “Do you think that the improvement of communication skills will improve the quality of health services and satisfaction of patients?”, 62% think positive, 30% of people think that it will Partly improve, 2% said they “Do not know”, and no one said “No”.

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On the question "Do you think that emotional intelligence as part of soft skills is a skill that doctors should possess to improve health services and patients' satisfaction?", 59% answered "Yes", 24% answered "Partly" and 17% answered "I don’t know", while none of the respondents answered "No".

Grafikon 5 - Do you think that emotional intelligence as part of soft skills is a skill that doctors should possess to improve health services and patients' satisfaction?

When asked, "Do you think that besides the self-esteem doctors need to possess an ability to control their own emotions as part of the emotional intelligence?", most respondents, or 74%, answered "Yes, it is very necessary", 22% "Partly necessary", 2% "I don’t know" and 2% "No, not necessary at all".

Grafikon 6 - "Do you think that besides the self-esteem doctors need to possess an ability to control their own emotions as part of the emotional intelligence?"

On the question: "Do you think that doctors need to possess an ability for non-verbal communication?", majority of respondents or 50%, answered "Yes", 31% said "Partly" and 19% said "I do not know", while none of the respondents said "No".

Grafikon 7 - "Do you think that doctors need to possess an ability for non-verbal communication?"
When asked "Do you think that doctors need to possess an ability to deal with unfamiliar and problematic situations?", the majority of respondents or 78%, answered "Yes", 22% answered "Partly", while none of the respondents answered with "I don't know" and "No".

Figure 8 - "Do you think that doctors need to possess an ability to deal with unfamiliar and problematic situations?"

When asked "Do you think that doctors need to have an ability to establish interpersonal relationships?", majority of respondents or 79%, answered "Yes", 21% "Partly", while none of the respondents answered with "I don't know" and "No".

Grafikon 9 - "Do you think that doctors need to have an ability to establish interpersonal relationships?"

To the question "Do doctors need to possess an ability to lead a team and work in a team?", 78% answered "Yes", 22% "Partly", while none of the respondents answered "No" and I do not know ".

Grafikon 10 - Do doctors need to possess an ability to lead a team and work in a team?"

3 DISCUSSION ON THE DATA OBTAINED

Regardless of the type of institution in which a person is employed, it is very important that person to possess ability to communicate effectively with his superiors, colleagues and staff. Regarding communication skills, following statements should also be taken into account:

- Do you think that improvement of communication skills will improve the quality of health services and patients' satisfaction?
- Do you think that as a doctor you should use the assertive approach of communication?

From the answers given by the respondents was concluded the following: If doctors possess the necessary communication skills, assuming that they possess the necessary professional skills, quality of health services and patient satisfaction will improve.

Emotional intelligence is a selection of non-cognitive skills, capabilities and competencies that affect a person’s ability to deal with environmental demands and pressures. There are four dimensions of emotional intelligence: Self-awareness (emotional self-awareness, self-esteem and self-criticism); Self-management (self-control, confidence, conscientiousness, adaptability, achievement orientation and initiative); Social awareness (empathy, organizational awareness and service orientation); Social skills (development of others, leadership, influence, communication, flexibility, conflict management, sense of responsibility, teamwork and collaboration).

Interpersonal skills are skills we use every day when communicating with other people, individually or in groups.
People with strong interpersonal skills are often more successful, both professionally and personally. Interpersonal skills include a wide spectrum of skills, although the most common is communication, such as listening, questioning and understanding body language, they also include skills and attributes related to emotional intelligence, or ability to understand and manage our own and the emotions of others. People with good interpersonal skills are capable to successfully operate in a team or group, or with other people. They can communicate effectively with others, regardless it is about family, friends, colleagues or clients. Consequently, interpersonal skills are very important in all areas of everyday life, whether it is a job, education or society.

When it comes to the level of emotional intelligence, following statements should be taken into account:
- Do you think that emotional intelligence in the context of soft skills is a skill doctors should possess in order to improve health services and patients’ satisfaction?
  - "Do you think that besides the self-esteem doctors need to possess an ability to control their own emotions as part of the emotional intelligence?"
  - Do you think doctors should possess non-verbal communication skills?
  - Do you think doctors need to have an ability to handle unfamiliar and problematic situations?
  - Do you think doctors need to have an ability to establish interpersonal relationships?

From the answers received, it can be concluded that: If doctors possess a high level of emotional intelligence, assuming that they possess the necessary professional skills, then the quality of health services will improve.

Most of the mistakes in medicine are due to a lack of communication and effective teamwork. Effective teams are rewarded and have similar characteristics. Working in a team requires trust, focus and belief in the final goal, more research and less conflicts. Although healthcare workers usually work in the team to coordinate and manage patients’ care, they are not trained with teamwork skills which can lead to patients’ safety incidents and medical mistakes. If doctors are able to lead a team and work in a team, assuming they possess the necessary professional skills, then that will improve the quality of health services and the satisfaction of teams.

4 CONCLUSION
Soft skills are personal attributes, features, characteristic social signs and communication skills needed to succeed. Soft skills characterize the way one person communicates with others. Unlike the hard, basic skills already learned, soft skills are similar to emotions or represent an insight that allows people to “read” others. These are much harder to learn, at least in a traditional classroom. They are also much more difficult to measure and rate. Soft socializing skills include adaptability, attitude, communication, creative thinking, work ethic, teamwork, networking, decision making, positivity, time management, motivation, flexibil-

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