

# Effective Communication for Reducing Patient Complaints

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Case Reports

## Background

Krishna Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS) Hospital is a 250-bed multi-specialty hospital in Gachibowli, Hyderabad, established in 2018. The NABH-certified hospital offers 24/7 emergency care and advanced medical services. The hospital reviewed patient complaints, particularly related to intravenous fluid monitoring, communication issues, and delays in responding to patient calls, and identified trends to understand the root causes of these issues. The problem identification process involved various stakeholders, including senior staff, junior staff, and potentially other departments, in analyzing complaints and developing solutions. This collaborative approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the issues and a coordinated response.

## Distinctiveness of the practice

The hospital adopted a multi-pronged approach to patient complaint management, encompassing proactive data analysis, innovative technology, and comprehensive staff training.

- **Data-driven decision-making:** The team analyzed patient feedback, categorized (e.g., communication issues, medication errors, delays in care) and identified trends. This was further enhanced with root cause analysis to understand the factors contributing to each complaint. Moreover, the survey among nurses & other key staff members were carried out to assess nurse satisfaction and emotional well-being. This tool helped identify areas where nurses felt overwhelmed or unsupported to develop targeted improvement strategies. This data-driven approach allowed them

to explore contextual interventions and promote continuous improvement. This ensured going beyond time-bound reactive measures. The feedback from the staff was also taken.

- **Technology-Enabled:** The hospital leveraged technology, such as the “to-do list” app for the purpose of setting reminders to check patients at specified interval, in order to enhance patient safety and streamline care processes. App features included details of patients (patients name, room number, fluid amount). A call system (for designated departments) was introduced to improve response time to inpatient assistance. For example, calls related to nursing needs go directly to the nursing staff, while housekeeping or maintenance requests are directed to the respective departments. This innovative use of technology improved efficiency and ensured timely care delivery, like IV fluid monitoring, cannulation techniques, medication administration, and patient handling.
- **Standardized Approach:** The hospital employed a structured approach to communication training with standardized scripts using AIDET (Introduction, Duration, Explanation, and Thank You) approach. This fostered consistent, patient-centered communication, building trust and improving the overall patient experience.
- **Comprehensive Staff Training:** Rigorous and standardized communication training for all staff was planned. The training covered functioning of the app (how to input tasks, setting reminders, using app effectively), call bell system, principles of AIDET communication, role-play scenarios

and continuous training feedback.

- **Collaboration:** The implementation involved collaboration between various departments, including nursing, IT, management, and quality assurance. This ensured a coordinated and integrated approach to address identified issues.
- **Continuous feedback:** Continuous feedback mechanism was developed to gather feedback from both patients and staff to identify concerns and areas of improvement. The patient welfare officers facilitate communication between patients and hospital administration, ensuring complaints are documented and resolved at the earliest. The feedback was also utilized to update and refine training programs and the “To Do List” app based on feedback and observed outcomes.

## Measuring Effects

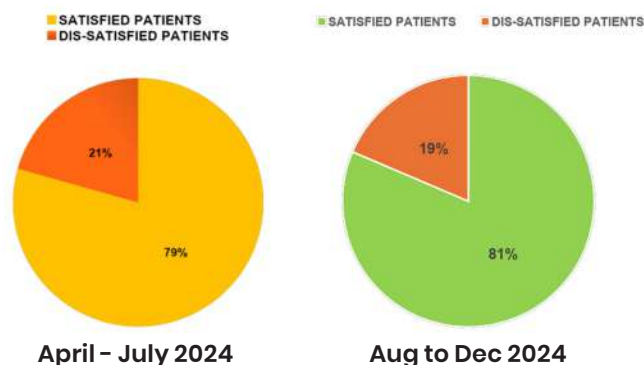
The implementation of this approach yielded positive results as follows:

- The new call bell system improved the speed and appropriateness of responses to patient requests, allowing nurses to focus more on clinical tasks rather than non-clinical issues.
- Complaints related to unmonitored IV fluids decreased from 27 to 12, while communication-related complaints dropped considerably to 9 from 17 (Figure 1).



**Fig. 1 Patient complaints pre and post implementation of the patient experience practice**

- Patient satisfaction improved from 79% to 81%. Patients reported feeling more informed and engaged in their care, leading to higher satisfaction levels (Figure 2).



**Fig. 2 Patient satisfaction in the period of April – July 2024 and Aug to Dec 2024.**

- Improved communication among nursing staff, coupled with training programmes resulted in a decrease in phlebitis incidents and fall risks among patients over the same period as the intervention; however, further investigation is required to know the causal relationship between intervention and patient outcomes.
- The regular employee survey revealed increased job satisfaction, work-life balance, confidence among nurses in their roles due to the training and use of communication scripts, which improved their interactions with patients and families.
- Improved communication skills among nursing staff fostered better collaboration with other healthcare professionals, contributing to a more integrated approach to patient care.
- The intervention reduced time spent on resolving complaints and improved resource utilization enhanced operational efficiency.
- The initiatives led to better clinical outcomes, including a reduction in complications associated with IV therapy and a decrease in the average length of stay for patients.
- Enhanced efficiency and a reduction in complaints likely resulted in cost savings for the hospital, as fewer resources were needed for managing patient issues and complaints.
- The focus on continuous improvement created an environment where ongoing enhancements in patient care and staff performance are prioritized, ensuring the hospital remains responsive to both patients and staff needs.

## Challenges

The team encountered numerous challenges as explained below:

- Resistance from the staff for implementing new protocols and technologies. These challenges were addressed by identifying and communicating benefits of these initiatives for both patients and staff. Moreover, provided adequate support, and implemented real-time feedback from patients as well as staff and timely troubleshooting of implementation problems.
- Integrating a new app into existing workflows was created technical challenges. To overcome this challenge, the hospital ensured adequate IT support, provided clear instructions and troubleshooting guides, and conducted regular system checks to minimize technical issues.
- Regular training sessions, ongoing monitoring, and performance feedback mechanisms were challenging to implement. Clear roles & responsibilities and job-aids were developed for the staff.

## Lessons Learned

The structured communication approach is crucial for improving patient experience by addressing patient complaints systematically thereby ensuring patient safety. This approach helped:

- Address patient concerns promptly and effectively, leading to improved overall patient satisfaction.
- Identify areas for improvement in services, ultimately leading to better quality of care for all patients.
- Proactively identify and mitigate potential safety concerns, minimizing the risk of medical errors and adverse events.
- Utilize patient feedback to refine hospital processes, systems, and staff training, fostering a culture of continuous quality improvement.
- Analyze root causes of complaints to prevent similar issues from arising in the future.

- Adhere to relevant legal and regulatory requirements concerning patient care and safety.

This approach aims to not only reduce patient complaints but also cultivate a culture of excellence in patient care.

## Sustainability of Practice

The sustainability of this practice is ensured through several key factors. It has been adopted as a standard “Patient Complaint Management System” within the hospital, facilitating its integration across departments. The hospital documented the effectiveness of this approach in operational, patients’ experiences, providing evidence-based support for its continued use. This can be further enhanced by systematic research to assess effectiveness of patient complaint management system in clinical, operational and health outcomes.

This documented evidence can be used to develop a standardized module on Comprehensive Complaint Management, enabling other hospitals to easily adapt and implement similar systems. Furthermore, proactive risk management, continuous quality improvement, staff empowerment, multidisciplinary collaboration, and strong leadership support all contribute to the long-term sustainability and success of this patient-centered approach.

## Conclusion

The structured communication approach noted considerable success in effectively addressing patients’ complaints. Key strategies included data-driven decision making, structured communication approach, use of technology (e.g., “to-do list” apps), continuous improvement through regular training and feedback, and approach to empower staff. These practices not only reduced complaints but also improved nurse confidence, patient outcomes, and overall hospital morale. Effective communication is pivotal in creating a positive healthcare environment, ultimately leading to better patient outcomes and a more satisfied workforce.

# Effective Communication for Reducing Patient Complaints

1

## Target Population

Hospital patients and healthcare staff, particularly nurses, involved in patient care and complaint resolution.

2

## Phenomenon of Interest

Enhancing patient experience and reducing complaints through structured communication, staff training, and technology-driven interventions.

3

## Context

A structured communication and complaint management system to improve patient care, staff engagement, and operational efficiency at KIMS Hospital.

## Conclusion



The structured communication approach significantly improved patient experience, reduced complaints, enhanced staff efficiency, and reinforced a culture of continuous improvement in hospital operations.

## Key Findings

1

### Enhanced Staff and Patient Satisfaction

Patient satisfaction increased from 79% to 81%, while nurses reported greater job confidence and improved work-life balance due to structured communication training.

2

### Reduction in Patient Complaints

Complaints related to unmonitored IV fluids dropped from 27 to 12, while communication-related complaints decreased from 17 to 9, improving patient experience.

3

### Operational and Clinical Improvements

The introduction of the call bell system, technology-driven task tracking, and standardized communication scripts led to improved response times, better collaboration, and increased efficiency in patient care.