

THE MANAGEMENT OF HOSPITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATION

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Purpose: To verify how and with what instruments hospital managements handle marketing communication. An important aspect of the analyses is a diagnosis of hospitals' promotional activities addressed to external and internal stakeholders, the purpose of which is to create appropriate relationships with patients and the socio-economic environment, and to build a favourable image of the medical establishment.

Design/methodology/approach: The research included a study of specialist literature in the field of marketing in healthcare facilities and the execution of two individual in-depth interviews (IDI) with Dr. Radek Neuwirth, director of the Agel Třinec-Podlesí cardiology hospital operating in the border areas of Těšín Silesia in the Czech Republic, and Ms. Monika Kubalíková, PhD., who is the quality manager at this hospital.

Findings: The marketing communication of hospitals has a multi-faceted nature. It can be evaluated not only from the perspective of providing information to current and future patients, but also from the point of view of the effectiveness and efficiency of promotional activities. In the long run, the competition for a favourable position in the market of medical services and for the limited financial resources of customers will be won by those hospitals which not only provide a higher standard of medical services, but which are also able to efficiently communicate with entities from the socio-economic environment. A particularly important role in this regard is played by the managerial competences of hospital executives and the optimal selection of the forms and tools of marketing communication.

Research limitations/implications: In the future, it would be worthwhile to repeat the research among both actual and potential patients of specialist hospitals as well as representatives of other stakeholder groups.

Practical implications: The effective management of a hospital's marketing communications provides many benefits in terms of their corporate image, which leads to market and financial advantages. The models for the optimal communication between a hospital and the public are constantly evolving, with the main emphasis now being on the growing importance of social media and inbound marketing.

Originality/value: The results of the analyses have cognitive and pragmatic value, especially in the context of the implementation of hospitals' marketing communications with stakeholders.

Keywords: Marketing communication, quality of medical services, patient service.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Improving the quality of healthcare services and patient service are the priority objectives in the marketing strategies of modern medical facilities. The need for a permanent increase in the quality of medical services is an important social and economic issue. A lot is said and written about it, especially in medical publications. However, it is worth emphasizing that quality, as discussed there, concerns primarily the technical quality of service provision (Ciechomski, 2008a, p. 254). From the point of view of marketing, the so-called functional quality of the process of providing medical services and the quality of the environment are of great importance, as these are the main aspects in a patient's evaluation of the quality of healthcare services.

The many factors that determine patients' satisfaction with the quality of medical services in terms of the treatment received and the comfort of a hospital stay include the following:

1. Responsibility – patients rely on the responsibility of doctors, nurses and physiotherapists, entrusting them with their health and often their lives.
2. Reliability – patients expect accuracy, reliability and dependability of services.
3. Expertise – patients expect specialized knowledge from medical personnel.
4. Availability of services and personnel at times and places convenient for patients.
5. Sensitivity – patients trust that the staff will show empathy.
6. Politeness – patients expect staff to be friendly towards them and treat them with respect (communicativeness).
7. Appearance – cleanliness and orderliness in the hospital, presentable attire of the staff and ID badges.

The quality of medical services also comprises such elements as communication with patients, the competence and responsiveness of the staff, as well as the reliability of the information conveyed (Wiśniewska, 2021, p. 27). An extremely important issue in the medical services market is responsibility for the patients' health, which also lies with those involved in communicating promotional messages that are addressed to actual and potential patients. Thus it is important that marketing communications should be characterized by ethical attitudes and directed at implementing good practices with regard to corporate social responsibility (Pilarczyk, Rogala, 2022, p. 240).

A hospital's marketing communication with its patients and other internal and external stakeholders must be designed and implemented in such a way that positive and up-to-date information about the quality of medical services should reach the addressees swiftly and seamlessly. An interesting description of the French model of hospitals' communication with the socio-economic environment is included in the work *Komunikowanie w ochronie zdrowia – interpersonalne, organizacyjne i medialne* [Communications in health care – interpersonal, organizational and media-based] (Goban-Klas, 2014, pp. 98-106).

Among the marketing communication tools used for shaping the image of a given establishment in the medical services market, public relations and publicity activities are considered the most important. The latter include creating objective information about the facility and its services, its public activities, and the organization of events aimed at creating a positive image of the medical entity. Public relations activities concern such areas as building relations with the media, crisis management, lobbying, internal and external public relations understood as reputation promotion, as well as sponsorship and patronage (Mruk, 2009, p. 121 et seq.). The effective public relations activities of a hospital have the following effects:

- they increase the recognition of the hospital, its employees, programmes and services,
- they increase the awareness of the standard of the medical services provided,
- they position the hospital as a community healthcare leader and create a desirable image of the hospital,
- they support raising funds for the development of new services,
- they help to anticipate and respond to potential negative media reports about the hospital,
- they support the staff recruitment process,
- they boost employee morale (www.awphd.org).

2. The marketing of hospitals and other healthcare facilities

Marketing is a market-oriented concept in which at least three elements are necessary for a common exchange process to occur: two market entities as parties to the exchange (suppliers, customers) plus the object of exchange (products and services). Market orientation means that all marketing activities should be based on the requirements, needs, preferences and expectations of various stakeholder groups associated with a given healthcare facility. The following are the most important goals of marketing activities in healthcare:

- communication with current and potential patients (presentation of offering and medical staff),
- acquiring new customers (sanatoriums, physiotherapy centres, dental offices and others),
- gaining the trust of patients (“ambassadors” of the medical facility in their community),
- increasing the hospital’s revenue (an increase in the sales of services and treatments offered),
- maintaining a positive image of the medical establishment,
- providing information about new services and treatments, purchases of innovative equipment and new specialists on the medical staff, that is implementing extensive internal marketing activities.

The distinctive features of hospitals, pharmaceutical companies and other healthcare institutions relate not only to their organizational structures, but also to their strategic management goals, missions and development objectives, as well as ways of implementing innovations (Buchelt, 2017, p. 142). The specific characteristics of the healthcare system, including the characteristics of stakeholder groups and their activities, are discussed in more detail in the work *Projakościowe zarządzanie w organizacjach ochrony zdrowia* [Pro-quality management in healthcare organizations] (Lisiecka, Czyż-Gwiazda, Lisiecka-Biełanowicz, 2017, p. 13 et seq.).

The economic assessment of the performance of a healthcare provider includes primarily such parameters as the evaluation of costs and benefits as well as an analysis of the efficiency of the entity's operations (Getzen, 2013, p. 219 et seq.). Among the many indicators used in measuring the efficiency of hospital operations are those related not only to patient satisfaction, but also to organizational and financial efficiency (Liu, 2013, p. 166). Measuring the current level of patient satisfaction should be the starting point for defining the objectives of quality-oriented measures and developing strategies for their implementation (Ciechomski, 2008b, p. 415).

The main barriers to increasing the efficiency of healthcare institutions are the following:

1. low productivity (efficiency) of hospital wards implied by unpredictable variables in terms of the demand for medical services,
2. fragmentation of treatment in the case of multi-organ conditions,
3. dispersion of medical services of one type in a given area,
4. shortage of medical staff, mainly doctors and nurses (Rogala et al., 2014, p. 164).

The managerial competences of a hospital's executives are extremely important for improving the efficiency of its functioning. Unfortunately, Poland lacks systemic solutions regarding competence requirements with minimal qualification restrictions (Kęsy, 2013, p. 222). Although career paths for employees working as doctors and nurses have been described and regulated, the same has not been done for managerial positions in healthcare facilities. As a result, these positions may be occupied by people who do not have the necessary knowledge, skills or other qualities predisposing them to leadership positions. It also sometimes happens that these competences are formally confirmed by various documents, but not by actual skills or aptitudes. Meanwhile, managers in charge of specialist hospitals are expected to have an innovative, flexible and effective approach to managing healthcare facilities (Głód, 2020, p. 13 et seq.). Scientific studies examining the impact of leadership on the broadly understood performance of various organizations, including hospitals, have quite a long tradition. Interesting results of research and analysis relating to Poland and Scandinavian countries can be found in the monograph *Przywództwo w placówkach medycznych. Doświadczenia z Polski i krajów nordyckich* [Leadership in medical institutions. Experiences from Poland and Nordic countries] (Tańska, 2017, p. 107 et seq.).

Interesting analyses concerning the demand for managerial knowledge in the areas of finance, marketing, quality management, infrastructure supervision, human resources management, information management and change management in healthcare are included in the work *Postawy personelu medycznego wobec zarządzania szpitalem* [Attitudes of medical personnel towards hospital management] (Nęcki, Kęsy, 2013, p. 108 et seq.). It contains the results of a survey conducted on a sample of 99 doctors and 63 nurses.

The marketing strategy of a healthcare facility should put an emphasis on efforts to constantly improve the quality of the services it provides and should skilfully communicate this fact to the hospital's external and internal stakeholders. The role of the quality of services is constantly growing, and this is related to an increase in patients' expectations and demands and the need to personalize patient service. On the other hand, medical facilities apply for certificates and accreditations, and this is related to the standardization of the range of services provided by various hospitals.

Different forms of organizing marketing services in public and non-public hospitals in Poland are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1.

Organization of marketing services in hospitals in Poland [%]

Itemization	Public hospitals	Non-public hospitals
A separate marketing department	19	21
A separate marketing position	14	25
Functioning within another department	12	6
Activities dispersed across many positions	15	23
No marketing is done	40	25

Source: own compilation based on: Kautsch, 2011, p. 216.

Through its promotional activities, a healthcare facility must communicate with potential buyers, inform them about the range of services offered and create the best possible image. The primary objectives of promotional activities are the following:

- increasing the facility's turnover and at the same time increasing its market share,
- increasing the sales of an offered service or group of services,
- seeking and acquiring new patients,
- creating a good image and gaining the trust of patients,
- proper transfer of information about the healthcare facility, including information about new services offered (Nowotarska-Romaniak, 2013, p. 70).

Table 2 lists the main marketing activities carried out by public and non-public hospitals in Poland.

Table 2.*Types of activities undertaken by hospital marketing services [%]*

Itemization	Public hospitals	Non-public hospitals
Creating and implementing a marketing strategy	29	44
Creating the image of the organization	53	54
Communication with contractors	72	64
Health promotion activities	56	36
Hospital promotion activities	62	85
Other marketing activities	40	18

Source: own compilation based on: Kautsch, 2011, p. 218.

It also has to be remembered that with the current incredibly dynamic development of communication technologies, classic marketing tools and strategies may not be particularly effective in terms of achieving goals, or may even fail (Brzozowska-Woś, 2013, p. 31 et seq.). We live in times when patients are very active when it comes to searching for information and want to make their own choices (Pacenti, Mancini, 2015, p. 100). A consequence of this is the expansion of social media and the growing role of inbound marketing. The media used by public and non-public hospitals for communicating with the addressees of promotional activities are listed in Table 3.

Table 3.*Communication channels used by hospitals [%]*

Itemization	Public hospitals	Non-public hospitals
Own website	96	98
Local press	80	78
National press	32	32
Sector-specific press	46	51
Radio	61	44
Television	63	51
Local web portals	43	39
Nationwide portals	19	22
Sector-specific portals	44	37
E-mail	66	59

Source: own compilation based on: Kautsch, 2011, p. 218.

In health services, building the market position of an entity that provides them depends on many factors, among which image is considered to be very important (Mruk, 2015, p. 86). The image determines how a given facility is perceived by current and potential patients, the level of patients' trust in the services provided, as well as the satisfaction of the medical personnel and their identification with the establishment where they are employed. Among the many elements that make up the image of a healthcare facility are its location, the design and functionality of the waiting room, the facility's website, and the behaviour of the staff, i.e. receptionists, nurses and doctors (Bukowska-Piestrzyńska, 2017, p. 88). The success of communication is determined also by the way in which medical interviews are conducted, which should be based on building trust, creating positive emotions and overcoming the patients' reservations.

The main pillars for creating the image of any organization are monitoring the environment and an efficient communication and information system (Pokusa, 2007, p. 110). The main institutional addressees of hospitals' image-building activities include the following:

- local government institutions, political parties, supervisory institutions,
- entities that provide financial resources (National Health Fund, banks),
- companies providing outsourcing services (security, cleaning)
- competitors and suppliers of equipment, drugs and medical supplies,
- educational institutions and labour market entities,
- opinion-forming institutions and organizations (unions, associations),
- institutions that cooperate in the treatment process, e.g. sanatoriums, physical therapists (Rogala et al., 2014, p. 165).

Relationship management with the stakeholders of a medical institution can be defined as a continuous and long-term process of creating relationships with partners in the internal and external environment through joint value creation, in such a way that the goals of both parties are achieved (Dobska, Kosinski, Urbaniak, 2022, p. 110). The foundation of relationship management, both at the strategic and tactical level, is the analysis of the relationship portfolio, in the light of which every organization should identify the network of all the relationships and skilfully manage it (Zolkiewski, Turnbull, 2022, p. 586). The quality of relationships in the healthcare environment is understood as the value carried by a type of bond between the exchange participants, characterized in terms of the compatibility of organizational cultures, decision-making styles and convergence of perceived values. It can be evaluated through the prism of three criteria: commitment, trust and satisfaction (Palmatier, 2008, p. 120). Effective relationship building with patients should include not only respect for their rights, but also the ability to increase patient satisfaction (Chalimoniuk-Nowak, 2022, p. 100). In doing so, it is also important to be able to resolve conflicts with difficult patients and manage the patient experience.

Various classifications of inter-organizational and intra-organizational relationships, depending on the adopted division criterion, are included in the work *Zarządzanie jakością relacji w organizacjach ochrony zdrowia* [Managing relationship quality in healthcare organizations] (Lisiecka-Belanowicz, 2016, p. 62 et seq.). Relationships are characterized by reciprocity, time span, process specificity and contextual dependence. An example of a concept that systemically explains the management of hospitals' relationships with their customers is CRM (Customer Relationship Management), which is intended to contribute to raising patients' satisfaction by fulfilling their requirements, wishes and expectations.

3. Healthcare in Poland and the Czech Republic

In order to better understand the conditions of managing healthcare facilities, and their efforts to offer high-quality services and the use of marketing tools, it is worth looking at selected data relating to the healthcare of two countries: Poland and the Czech Republic. According to statistical data, in 2022 healthcare expenditure in Poland amounted to 172.9 billion PLN, and in the Czech Republic 17.9 billion CZK ([www.google.cz/search?q=analiza-zdravotnictvi-final.pdf+\(ecn.cz.\)](http://www.google.cz/search?q=analiza-zdravotnictvi-final.pdf+(ecn.cz.))). When converted into Euros for the purpose of comparison, the expenditure in Poland is 36.9 billion and in the Czech Republic 7.4 billion EUR. Since there is a significant population difference between Poland and the Czech Republic (37.8 million in Poland and 10.7 million in the Czech Republic), more meaningful data were obtained after calculating healthcare expenditure per capita, which in Poland is 976 EUR, while in the Czech Republic 688 EUR. Patients in the Czech Republic can receive treatment in 134 general hospitals, which include 8 academic hospitals, 65 provincial hospitals, 23 municipal hospitals, 37 private hospitals and 1 church hospital (Brothers of Mercy hospital in Vizovice). Private hospitals in the Czech Republic operate on different terms than in Poland. All of them have contracts with national health insurance funds and most of the services are financed from these funds except non-standard, cosmetic, corrective and similar treatments, which are chargeable, also in state hospitals.

The Polish healthcare system is organised according to ministerial identification codes. The number of hospitals with the code denoting a specific organizational and legal form (a limited liability company or a joint-stock company in which the State Treasury, local government unit or medical university hold shares amounting to at least 51% of the share capital) is 652, including 39 hospitals which are run by state medical universities and 17 by research institutes. The number of remaining hospitals is 723, including 5 facilities run by the church. The numbers of hospital beds cannot be meaningfully compared as the available data from the Polish health service are from 2020, while the Czech data are from 2018, so the data can only be treated as approximate. There were 167,567 beds in Polish general hospitals, and 57,578 in Czech hospitals, which when calculated per 10,000 population amounts to 44 beds in Poland and 54 beds in the Czech Republic.

It is also worth mentioning that an interesting description of alternative solutions regarding the functioning of the health sector in 16 countries, including Poland and the Czech Republic, can be found in the book *Organizacyjne i prawne aspekty systemów ochrony zdrowia wybranych państw* [Organizational and legal aspects of healthcare systems in selected countries] (Urbaniak, 2019, pp. 9-333).

4. Management of patient service quality and marketing communication based on the example of the Agel Třinec-Podlesí Hospital

The Agel Třinec-Podlesí Hospital is a cardiology hospital operating in the border areas of Těšín Silesia in the Czech Republic. It is a private hospital, its sole shareholder being the Agel joint-stock company. It is a member of the Agel Group, the most successful private healthcare provider in Central Europe. The hospital provides high-quality specialist care in the treatment of cardiovascular diseases. It is part of the Czech Ministry of Health's network of comprehensive cardiovascular care centres. The hospital is fully certified, regularly renews its accreditation, and is one of the leading specialist medical centres in the Czech Republic.

Regarding the organizational structure of the Agel Třinec-Podlesí Hospital, the facility's management is the 7 people on the Board (director, 2 deputies, 2 members, quality manager, plus head nurse and personnel manager in one person) and it comprises the following departments: Department of Cardiac Surgery; Department of Cardiology; Centre for Vascular and Mini-invasive Surgery; Anaesthesiology and Resuscitation; Department of Clinical Biochemistry; Department of Rehabilitation; Interventional Radiology; Emergency Room; and Specialist Outpatient Clinics. Since 2001, the hospital has been fully committed to improving the quality and safety of patient care. In 2002, the Accreditation Committee awarded the "Accreditation Certificate" to the Podlesí Hospital for the first time, confirming the high quality of its services. The last periodic accreditation of the Agel Třinec-Podlesí Hospital took place in 2021.

In order to obtain comprehensive information regarding the forms and instruments of marketing communication by the Podlesí Hospital, which is a significant institution in the Czech healthcare market, in-depth research was conducted in the form of two interviews: one with the director of the hospital, Dr. Radek Neuwirth, MBA, Chairman of the Management Board; and the second with the quality manager, Ms. Monika Kubalíková, PhD. The interviewees answered identical questions. The first question concerned the importance of marketing in the management of a specialist hospital. Both respondents stated that marketing is of great importance to the hospital. It is multidimensional and distinctive in nature. Its distinctiveness is related to the diversity of its medical facilities performing different missions and goals that apply in different development strategies. The specific nature of marketing in health services is also connected with the intensity of applying individual marketing tools and process management. In the hospital in question marketing is handled by a marketing specialist, who also cooperates with the marketing department of the entire AGEL Group. The need to apply the rules of marketing in the hospital is primarily related to the search for tools and ways to achieve the effects of an existential nature. The importance of marketing stems from the importance of the quality of services and how these services fulfil the needs of patients. The hospital applies the concept of marketing management to stimulate demand for its

services. In turn, doctors and other medical personnel must strive for the best possible professional reputation in their exceptional occupation.

The next question concerned the image of the organization and in particular how the Agel Třinec-Podlesí Hospital strives to maintain a positive image. The respondents indicated that the basis for maintaining a positive image is achieving excellent medical results and providing high-quality specialist care. It is essential to introduce modern treatment methods, especially with regard to catheter-based treatments of cardiovascular diseases and other minimally invasive treatment methods, which helps the hospital maintain its reputation of a leading medical centre in the Czech Republic and an important specialist hospital in Europe. The way to customer loyalty is primarily through a positively perceived brand. The image and overarching values create emotional bonds in the minds of customers that keep patients coming back. Creating a bond between the institution and customers is a key element of the brand. As a result, the level of customer loyalty increases. A strong hospital brand confirms the quality of the facility, and vice versa.

Current patients are “ambassadors” of the medical facility in their community. Therefore, the next question of the in-depth interview concerned the hospital’s gaining of patients’ trust. According to the interviewees, the patient is always at the centre of attention; partly because this is the hospital’s mission, but above all because a satisfied patient is a guarantee of the hospital’s long-term existence. Healthcare in the hospital is patient-centred. The hospital tries to fulfil patients’ wishes and thus ensure their satisfaction. Patient satisfaction is also an important indicator of the quality of nursing care. Patients assess the quality of nursing care in relation to meeting their basic needs. The priority of nursing is a thorough identification and analysis of every patient’s needs as well as helping in fulfilling them. A patient who is examined or treated is assured of anonymity and guaranteed that the performed procedures are safe. All services are provided at a professional level with the use of modern medical equipment. Ultimately, the hospital wants to provide not only a full diagnostic examination but, above all, immediate therapeutic intervention so that the patient leaves the hospital not only with a diagnosis but also with a resolved health issue. This is one of the key ways to gain patients’ trust.

An important element of the marketing of healthcare facilities is the quality of the information that patients receive. The Agel Třinec Podlesí Hospital does this very well. The hospital informs its current and potential patients on the hospital’s website about new services and treatments, about the purchases of innovative equipment, and about new members of the medical staff. Information is provided both electronically and during patients’ visits to the hospital. In addition to the above-mentioned marketing tools, the hospital uses social media (Facebook, Instagram), sends e-mails and newsletters, and uses marketing communication via mobile phones (SMS, MMS, mobile applications). The hospital’s marketing also makes use of QR codes, which, when scanned, redirect users to a specific website.

Building a brand means not only good relations with patients, but also optimal relations with the environment. The hospital in question shapes its social relations with the environment through a company blog, which it sees as not only an attractive but also effective form of reaching potential patients. The hospital also creates a positive image of itself in the professional press; participates in events for the public, e.g. providing first aid or hygiene training for children and adults; and regularly participates in charity events.

Guaranteeing quality clinical care and controlling the level of care are also important aspects of hospital operations. Therefore, during the interview, the respondents were asked how the hospital ensures clinical quality and the availability of professional medical staff. The answer was that the hospital monitors the behaviour and activity of medical personnel, including their appearance and verbal communication skills. Quality is not only the ability to provide the best care, but above all the ability to meet all the needs and expectations of patients, who are the hospital's customers. The quality of nursing care is usually assessed by the degree to which the patient's needs are met during treatment, and the degree of professional sensitivity of nurses and doctors to patients' problems. When taking care of patients, teamwork between doctors, nurses, physical therapists, dieticians and other staff is essential.

The patient, being a customer, expects "professional behaviour", i.e. a doctor or nurse introducing themselves properly at the first meeting and addressing him or her appropriately and with patience. The quality of the services provided is monitored regularly every three years by an independent external organization, which checks compliance with the accreditation criteria in accordance with national standards. In addition, as part of quality improvement, the hospital conducts periodic audits focused primarily on so-called high-risk activities, such as proper handling of medical products, keeping medical records, adherence to hygiene procedures to prevent the transmission of hospital-acquired infections, safety audits and others.

The hospital has an effective process for monitoring adverse events. Employees are informed of the possibility of reporting potential risks that could lead to patients being harmed or put in danger, and are appropriately motivated to report them preventively. The occurrence of adverse events is regularly reviewed. Increasing safety is a long-term goal and one of the priorities for the hospital management.

In order for the hospital to be positively assessed during the audit and be able to receive a certificate, it must continually strive to ensure patient satisfaction and verify its level. Agel Trinec-Podlesí Hospital monitors the following elements of patient satisfaction:

- correctness of the applied treatment procedures,
- form and course of patient care,
- amount of information for the patient and their family during treatment,
- compliance with patients' rights and ethical principles in the provision of health services,
- humanitarian (holistic) and not only a medical approach to the health problem,

- empathy – kindness, willingness and ability to understand and support the patient's personality,
- effective communication – smile, touch, willingness to listen,
- respect for patients' rights – the right to dignity, privacy, intimacy, etc.,
- properly kept medical records.

The hospital obtains feedback on patient satisfaction through patient satisfaction surveys. Patients receive the surveys via a QR code. The hospital has received numerous awards for its exemplary satisfaction surveys for both inpatients and outpatients.

An important element in the quality of medical services is the availability of medical services, including the waiting times for tests and treatments. The surveyed hospital provides medical services mainly with regard to cardiovascular diseases. The second group are patients with urological conditions. Despite the fact that patients come to the Agel Třinec-Podlesí Hospital from all provinces of the Czech Republic, the waiting time for examinations is relatively short, not exceeding one month, and in emergency cases the service is provided immediately.

As part of quality assurance, the hospital has implemented a number of projects to improve the quality of services for patients. Examples of such projects include electronic documentation done on tablets, telemedicine, and scientific research work of the hospital staff.

Despite the relatively high level of medical services offered, very few foreigners are treated at the Agel Třinec-Podlesí Hospital. The most common cases are foreigners residing in the Těšín Silesia area who experience sudden cardiac problems. Czech regulations allow non-residents living in the EU to be reimbursed for medical procedures up to the amount for which treatments for Czech citizens are valued. The rest of the total amount must be paid by the foreigner themselves. Non-EU patients, on the other hand, must cover the full cost of the medical services received.

It is also worth mentioning that the period of the Covid-19 pandemic was a very difficult time for the hospital. Its management was urged to transform part of the hospital into Covid wards. However, this would have meant risking the health and possibly lives of the hospital's primary patients whose condition required immediate specialist intervention. However, various restrictions complicated the hospital's operations, and patients deprived of personal contact with their families recovered more slowly. In addition, some patients, fearing Covid infection, abandoned their planned procedures, which not only disrupted the hospital's work schedule, but in many cases caused the disease to progress.

In summary, it can be said that the medical successes of the Agel Třinec-Podlesí Hospital to date and the generally high quality of patient service, together with its optimal relationships with various entities in the socio-economic environment, are the result of a well-thought-out and consistently implemented strategy. According to the institutions management, its success can be attributed primarily to creating favourable conditions for the continuous improvement in the quality of patient service by doctors, nurses and administrative staff.

5. Conclusions

Effective management of a hospital's marketing communication provides many benefits. First and foremost, it increases the recognition of the hospital, its services, health programmes and staff, and enables the positioning of the hospital as a healthcare leader in the community. In addition, it builds and consolidates an internally coherent image of the hospital among patients and entities in its environment. It positively influences the awareness of the significance of the medical services provided and supports the acquisition of funds for the development of new services.

Marketing communication directed within the hospital as an organization strengthens the satisfaction and morale of employees and supports the process of recruiting new staff. In addition, it helps to properly respond to possible negative media reports about the hospital and efficiently implement crisis management procedures.

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