

# Ethics, Empathy and Innovation in Services-Best Practice of Hospital Marketing

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## Abstract

**Background:** With fast increasing demands of the healthcare and more of the private players taking initiatives in becoming the healthcare service providers, innovative marketing approach is very important to create the value system in the healthcare sector specially the hospital industries in India. The traditional and parochial sales approach of referral and commission based business needs to be replaced by the ethical marketing. With advancement of technologies and growing economy of India, people, the patient are becoming more aware, more demanding. It is high time we have to involve innovation into services and create a societal marketing process. We have to focus on strengthening the services to appeal the sales; customer value system has to be prioritised through patient empathy, patient centricity, and patient and providers relationship. Healthcare services now are not just worth customising but also need personalising and becoming the part of the patient story. The article discussed the various approaches of ethical and innovative marketing and strengthening the healthcare services by the providers.

**Methods:** Methods to develop such values could be regular induction program of the staff, surprise visit checking the patient care approach, rewards and incentives approach, patient feedback and its assessment and encouraging the healthcare marketers to involve ethics in their sales tactics. Innovative approach of marketing can be done through IT based services and online accessibility.

**Results:** This will help create trust and transparency where the patient will change the wrong perception and build the positive image of the healthcare providers. Word of mouth in the healthcare services are the key tools of marketing and branding and this personalised connect will help the providers create a sustainable competitive advantage in building the patient loyalty and market values.

**Approach:** By developing the patient value system by making care and personal approach towards the patient not as a system but as a culture and by inculcating this value from top management personnel to the ward boy level staff in a hospital..

**Keywords:** Hospital marketing, online services, patient engagement, services, ethical business, patient value, sales

## 1. Introduction

“The country needs to cover the cumulative deficit of around 2.8 Million hospital beds by 2014 to match up with the global average of 3 beds per 1000 population. Strong demand for hospital services in tier-II and tier-III cities are bound to fuel the growth of the hospital services sector. We anticipate that most of this demand will be met by private investments as majority of the government investments will be focused on primary healthcare segment”[1]. Private sector's share in healthcare delivery is expected to increase from 66% in 2005 to 81% by 2015 [2]. In fast growing healthcare demands creating need for the more hospitals, it is very important what Healthcare Service Provider uses as its marketing practices. Marketers today have lost their patience becoming target obsessed and always seek for the short cuts to achieve the revenue. It is very common phenomenon to approach for the

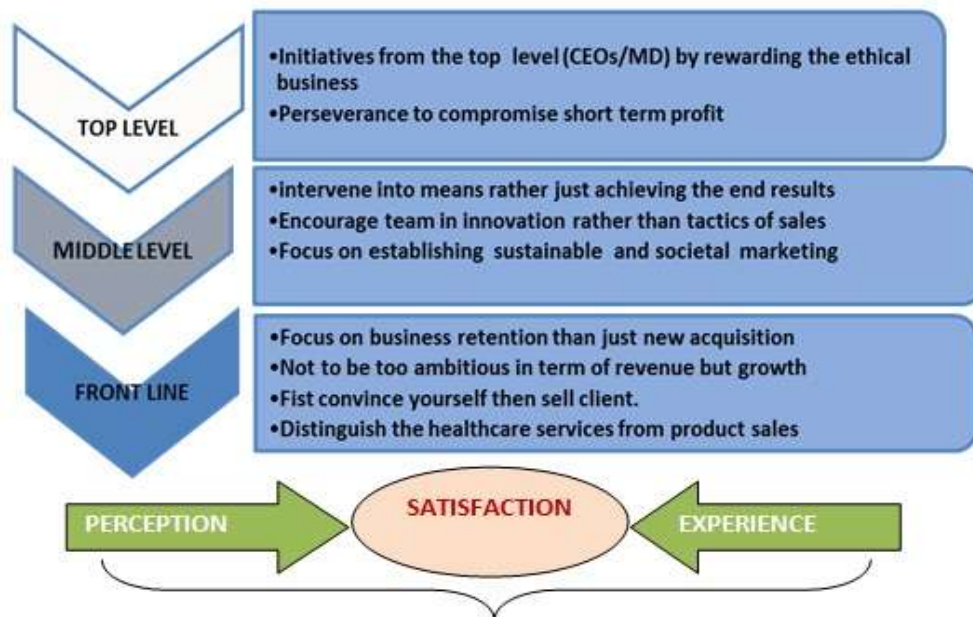
commissioning business, intermediaries, referrals from doctors, small clinics and other spokes but the point is that such marketing stunts though are responsive in term of revenue growth but is always seen from the doubtful perspective from the patient and such healthcare commercialisation and misleading incidents has done the negative marketing for many hospitals.

**1.1. Ethical stance of Marketing: is it a progressive move?**

Hospital industry is highly competitive market with lot of business challenges where the investors waiting for the Return on Investment-ROI , Margin (BDATI-Before Depreciation/Assets/Tax/Interest), Onus of stake holders, growth rate and liquidity and most importantly the customer satisfactions are important factors of sustaining in the market. The obvious question arises is how progressive is to adapt the ethical business stance. How can we move this ethical stance where the competitors are adapting the unethical business tactic, where the colleagues are using the ugly trick to meet their revenue targets and sales pressure expecting employees to perform consistently? This could be sensitive issue to touch may lead the subject to totally different direction discussing various foul means and unethical practices in healthcare sector whether nexus between the drugs and the doctors, organs transplants, commissions agents, playing on fear factors..etc. With little courage and contemplation, the article attempts to respond this question with further scope of research and feedback.

**The initiative from within** Ethics is the important part of the business and has to be established the way that it can be seen clearly and perceived by the customer creating value for the money. If the hospital incorporates the value system into the business rather just chasing the sales target, revenue would be slow but consistent and sustainable. This has to come from the top level of the healthcare organisation by encouraging and rewarding the ethical sales process and zero tolerance to unethical tactics. The message from the top will convey the message to the bottom and finally impact the perception of the end user

Figure 1. Attitude change: Top management to bottom staff



**Sustaining the Business-** Customer need for the healthcare service is unevenly distributed and is the prevalent healthcare corruptions and commercialisation of healthcare with high out of pocket expenditure has created the more expectations of the people further being more demanding. This ethical business model would enable the patient and prospects build the trust and minimise the gap between the Perception and experience further establishing the satisfaction and long term sustainable relationship with consumer.

## Strong Services, Innovation and Empathy-Sales Proposition for Hospital Sector

The sales positioning in the healthcare/hospital industry can be done through strong service delivery, innovation creating value system through personalised care and empathy. The Services impacts stronger than promotion as it builds the image through '**Word of mouth**' which is the key marketing tools of any service industry where providers can create a **strong sales proposition**. A harsh word of the ward boy in hospital or bad behaviour of auxiliary nurse can tarnish the image of the overall services of the hospitals no matter how good the surgeon did its job. By means of innovation and connecting with the patient the strong societal marketing approaches can create value for the services.

Discussing the various **Strong service propositions creating value:**

### 1. **Right Treatment, Right Place, Right Cost: Basic Services improvement**

**Right Treatment (Cure and Care):** It's not just treating the ailment but also treating and caring the patient and behavioural approach of the providers and the hospital staff. This includes;

**Skilled doctors-**Expert medical professional and skilled doctors the primary factor for the patient drive and thus the brand value and promotion of the doctor is very important.

**Good IPD/OPD services:** Cordial nursing staffs, hassle free billing services and smooth waiting time arrangement are some of the important factors counting for the quality services.

**Patient doctor interaction-**Doctors behaviour and transparency with the patients works strongly in strong message for patient referrals. Attitude change from both ends is needed.

**Disease Management-** This includes health coaching, guidance and post treatment advices and connectivity with the patients. It also includes the infection control, white gloves and right prognosis of the ailment with most appropriate line of treatment.

**Right Place:** Feeling to have reached the correct place is the strong factors of brand recall.

**Moment of Truth-** Research shows that it takes just 7 seconds to form a first impression when face-to-face and as few as 4 seconds on the phone. That's the speed of judgment about someone as well. The moment patient enters the premises of the Hospital; he/she has to be given a very good response which as first response is long lasting.

A. Within first minutes of the entry patient must get the idea of the positions of the reception, waiting area, OPD chambers, toilets and Billing department.

B. Within minimum of 2 minutes the response by the reception or patient care department with initiatives from hospital side. Smile from host creates confidence in the guest that I have come to right place.

**Waiting Time-** Waiting area along with the clean and comfortable space should be able to engage the patient conveying its unique core services. Sales Literatures, posters, leaflets...etc.

**Right Cost:** Cost not just as price but value for the price is important for feel-good factor.

**Cost Comparison-**Cost difference from other providers builds sense of value for money

**High margin with perceived value:** The expected cost and the real cost difference creates customer delight and is the strong sales strategies.

### 2. **Engaging Patient –Providers to be the part of the patient story**

- i. **Online through technology:** We can engage patients through portals where patient can access their healthcare information , update their medical records through Electronic Health Records, check the latest treatment updates in the providers.

- ii. **Personal Engagement:** Technology may be one tool but not the only tool to engage patients. People need providers which can engage them as full partner in their care through periodic communication, feedback call, information of health check camps...etc
  - iii. **Patient-Doctors Interaction:** Doctors interacting with the patient through compassion and kindness always leaves a strong impression. This also creates transparency between the patient and the doctor dismantling fear factors and doubt on the line of treatment. In this industry doctors plays the pivotal role of patient traffic in any hospital and this is increased by patient referring other patient basis good personal experience.
  - iv. **Empathy- Services to be personalised than just customised:** We find the expensive hospitals with all modern resources but often obsessed with customised mechanical process of the staff. All patients are human first and its natural tendency to be treated as human being first than a client or a customer or subject of patient. Staff and employees at times are so busy in their mechanical routine tasks that the patient gets the impression that they **'just don't care'**. Empathetic behaviour towards the patient creates a high value for the price that cannot be compensated by rich infrastructure
3. **Social Media Approach:** Through social forum access to patient where they can share their feedback and testimonials providers can really create a robust branding. It would also make them accountable for the services and image conscious creating a natural check and balance for the service excellence.
  4. **Data Mining:** Patient Data are the most important resource and the most neglected one in the healthcare market in India. This has huge potential where healthcare organisations can truly understand the performances. By analysing the claim ratios, patient visits, cost data, providers can identify the margins, cost of specific services in a hospitals, assessment can also lead them optimise the cost and may lead them to create a competitive pricing, cost containment, budget assessments.
  5. **Hub and Spoke Model:** Small sub unit in different location will maximise the reach of patient.
  6. **Online Services:** Some unique services such as Online appointment, Pre Consultation Consultancy/Second opinion-/ Electronic Health Records, case management/Follow up consultation reminders

## 2. Conclusion

With innovation and personalised services to patient through empathy and care it is not utopian to believe that in today's highly competitive market, we can grow through ethical means of marketing. Empathy and care, once made inclusive with the services can create a robust bonding between the patient and the providers. Innovation and care when combined can beat all other sales tactics and has potential to establish the sustainable marketing strategies contributing significantly in the high market share.

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