

Role of Public Relations in Hospitals

By H. B. JOSHI

HOSPITAL organisation has a complex web of communication within the hospital as well as outside the hospital. This web of communication is the life line of relations within the hospital, i.e. with the employees and outside the hospital, with the consumer, i.e., people in the community the hospital serves. This latter aspect of relationship we term as public relations.

The art of public relations is very vital for the survival of hospitals because hospital exists for patients and patients are from the public. Thus, to keep a balance between external and internal relations is the job of the hospital administrator.

The basic factors of public relations are :

- (a) The attitude of persons;
 - (i) Those employed in the hospital, (ii) The patient. (iii) The patients relatives; (iv) The public (consumer).
- (b) The organisation of services.
- (c) The conditions of building and equipment.
- (d) Development of understanding and appreciation of hospital services.
- (e) Explanation to the consumer (public) of the reasons for hospital standards—how they protect human life and promote safer and more adequate care of the sick and injured.
- (f) Fostering of an attitude of goodwill on the part of public towards the hospital.
- (g) Promotion of closer co-operation among all hospitals in the community and elimination of any unhealthy spirit of rivalry.
- (h) Explanation of the hospital as a medium of teaching doctors, nurses, paramedical patients and their relatives.

Now, let us look more closely at these fundamentals.

A. The Attitude of Hospital Personnel : I have stated that the 8 points listed are not necessarily in order of importance, but this one, I believe, is in its right position at the head of the list.

Whenever I face a problem difficult to solve, I always try putting myself in the other person's shoes. I try to imagine his point of view.

Let us imagine that you are taken suddenly ill and whisked off to a hospital.

You are *sick*. You are *miserable*. Like it or not, you are *scared*. Think of the impact on you of the people you first meet in a hospital—the receptionists; the admitting clerk; the porter who heels you to the ward; the doctor.

Just one of these people has to be rude, off-hand, unfriendly or unsympathetic and you feel worse.

You are more scared than ever.

But, suppose you are greeted on arrival to the hospital by nurses assuring that all that is possible will be done to speed up your recovery, it makes you feel good if **You don't feel alone ANY LONGER.**

The best medium of Public Relations is the **The Satisfied Patient.**

Then, take the position of your relatives. They are worried, anxious people. They are entitled to every consideration. As far as they are concerned, their whole attitude to that hospital in future will depend on the attitude of the staff towards their dear ones and towards themselves.

And, that of the public in general? Personnel who are rude off-hand to the hundred and one people apart from patients and relatives who make contact with a hospital are building up a heap of trouble for that hospital some day.

Under the heading of **General Public** I should include the **Press**. Do you regard pressmen as just another nuisance with which you have to contend? Do you regard the reporter and the photographer as snooping busy bodies endeavouring to break in on the sanctity of the hospital? If so, think again?

Editors and reporters have their job to do just as does the hospital executive. Their job is to obtain news and pictures to which they feel they are entitled in the public interest.

Long experience has taught me that on close acquaintance the other person is not such a bad sort, after all. Treat the pressmen as human beings, meet them half way and you will find that they are usually reasonable. Tell them your problems of medical ethics—of the patient's rights and they will usually understand.

Finally, the attitude of the staff towards one another :

Yes, it is of the utmost importance that we administer a happy hospital; one where the staff are trained in the right spirit; where there is a spirit of co-operation where all work on a friendly basis.

B. The Organisation of Services : This is self-explanatory really, and needs little elaboration.

In the U.S.A. they have a saying that no matter how skilled the medical and nursing service, this all goes to naught if the patient's milk is cold.

What does all this have to do with your public relations?

C. The Condition of Buildings and Equipment : What must the public think of a hospital which has been allowed to fall into bad repair? Where the equipment is dilapidated, there is evidence of uncleanliness and where gardens have been allowed to run to seed.

A hospital, above all things, must be spick and span, scrupulously clean.

D. Development of Understanding of Hospital Services : The services of a hospital are of the utmost value to the community. Not only are these services of great value in case of illness or injury; but a hospital is the centre of health services generally.

Its patients, before leaving, are taught the principles of good health to what we term health education.

E. Fostering an Attitude of Goodwill Towards the Hospital : A hospital needs every friend it can get. The public can regard it as a cold, institutional place to be avoided at all costs. But by proper education the public can be made to see it in its right perspective—to want to assist in these services, provided by a friendly hospital.

F. Explanation to Public of Hospital Standards : How they project life and provide safe and more adequate care of the sick.

Why do hospitals demand high

standards in the attending doctors, nurses and other medical personnel? Why are ethical standards set high? The Public must be educated in the knowledge that all this is to protect the patients.

G. Promotion of Close Co-operation among all hospitals and elimination of spirit of rivalry.

It is a bad look-out for the sick when hospitals depart from ethics and compete for business. Public arguments as to relative merits of hospitals breed dangerous doubts in the minds of the public.

H. Explanation of Value of the Hospital as a Means of Teaching: Doctors, Nurses and other Medical personnel as also few of the public realise that hospitals are great teaching centres. The large teaching hospital plays a big part in the training of doctors. Other hospitals help by training graduates during their residence.

Training of nurses, technicians, dietitians, hospital administration and other personnel is of the utmost value to the community at large—and the public should be educated to this fact. This training inservice is a moral booster.

To what extent is publicity needed of some basic features of the programme? The answer is "To a GREAT EXTENT". But let us qualify this by stating that there are two kinds of publicity—good and bad.

Obviously, we are dealing with good publicity. To me it is a moot point where public relations and publicity begin. They are very closely interwoven in some respects. For example, how are we to develop public understanding and appreciation of the hospital service which we have listed under public relations, unless we use publicity?

These are some basic features of a publicity programme: All possible media should be used: writing, speaking, visual means, exhibition.

This brings up the important matter of relationships with the press.

Irving Scobb once said, "The Press published few items that do not give offence to somebody or fail to please somebody." It has also been said that newspaper can safely criticise nothing except the man-eating shark. Newspaper people generally find hospital people are hard to get on with,

they feel a sense of frustration about hospitals. Editors and reporters have their job to do and they have their duty to the public. Hospitals have their duty to their patients.

Such problems can be solved by a frank and friendly discussion with the Editors of the Press.

(i) A plan can and must be worked out for friendly co-operation.

(ii) Every hospital should have a small brochure prepared setting out interesting facts about the hospital. Essentials are:

(a) Attractive pictures with fitting captions,

(b) Letter press should be limited but well written—pungently and with human interest.

(c) Pictures, blocks, layout and paper should be of high quality—also captions.

On the question of pictures, these rate very highly as a medium of publicity and some experts would prefer one good picture with a telling caption to a column of letter press.

(iii) *The Annual Report:* Provided it has some interesting pictures with telling captions; provided it is well laid out, contains well-written letterpress and not too much of it; provided its statistics are preferably in a pictorial form.

(iv) Use of media of broadcasting, Television: The Speaker must be good—or better to keep him off the air.

(v) Visits of inspection properly arranged and conducted. These can be a powerful media in selling the hospital story.

(vi) Other usual media, such as motion pictures, exhibits, etc.

To put it in a nutshell, the hospital cannot function to its best advantage without a well-planned programme of PUBLIC RELATIONS AND PUBLICITY.

It is an interesting and fascinating subject; it's also a specialised subject.

LEARN ALL YOU CAN ABOUT IT—FOR IT CAN MAKE OR MAR YOU AS AN ADMINISTRATOR.

Staff Nurse and Training Aspects

By Mrs. S. A. SAMUEL

NURSING education has undergone a phenomenal change in the past two decades. From the apprentice oriented training in hospitals it has now grown considerably to occupy a place in the universities. Nursing, being an art as well as a science, commands equal stress both in theory and practice. No amount of teaching can produce a better nurse unless the student gets an opportunity to see good nursing care practised in the actual setting. The largest number of nurses working in the clinical setting are the staff nurses. They assume the responsibility to provide optimum patient care.

Every nurse is a potential teacher. Each one is expected to contribute her mite in promotive, preventive and curative measures. Every member has a responsibility towards the training of personnel. A nurse today is not confined within the four walls of a hospital, but can serve in a variety of settings like community, schools, industry, etc.

Role Model

A staff nurse is a role model for the student nurses. Every action of

hers in caring for a patient is observed by the immature students. They try to copy her in the process of becoming a full-fledged nurse. The proverb, 'Actions speak louder than words' is well known. Demonstrating good quality patient care is the best way to teach patient care. Words do not have the same effect. The effectiveness of demonstration method need not be elaborated in teaching situations. When a student nurse sees a procedure being done by a competent person, she learns to do it and does it with self-confidence.

According to the Indian Nursing Council records, there are over 260 schools of nursing around the country turning out over 5200 trained nurses each year. Who trains them? Who supervises and guides them in the practical fields? A study of the teacher-student ratio of nursing schools will reveal the naked fact that there is an acute shortage of Tutors. There are schools with over 200 students manned by four or five Tutors. How can they supervise all these students in the clinical area where students are posted in