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1

A Study of Ethics in Hospital Advertising

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ABSTRACT

Advertisement, be it commercial or non-commercial and be it about the product or service, should adhere to some ethical standards and as a rule should not cause any harm to any group of the society, in whatsoever manner it might be. The commercial advertisers often seek to generate increased consumption of their products or services through 'branding', which involves associating a product name or image with certain qualities in the minds of consumers. However, the healthcare services can hardly be run purely on commercial principles and as such, there is fundamental difference between advertising by hospitals and by other commercial institutions. Healthcare services are one of the basic needs of human being. According to World Health Organization, due to faulty lifestyle, millions of people worldwide encounter illness, disability and even death, and the problems like metabolic diseases, joint and skeletal problems, cardio-vascular diseases, hypertension, overweight, diabetes and so on. The strict adherence to ethical standards in hospital advertising is essential to infuse the trust and confidence among ever-growing number of patients or end-users of health-care services. Medical profession is regarded as a noble profession and sustenance of its dignity and nobility is expected to reflect in all activities carried out by hospitals, including the advertisement of the healthcare services provided by them.

KEYWORDS: Healthcare Services, Ethics, Advertisement, OPD, IPD



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INTRODUCTION

Hospitals provide health services, which entails medical experts, organizations, and ancillary health care workers providing medical attention to those in distress. Health services cover emergency, preventative, rehabilitative, long-term hospitalization, diagnostic, primary, painkilling and home care too. All these services are patient-centered. According to service type, the healthcare services market is generally segmented as (a) Hospitals and Clinics (b) Physicians and Other Health Practitioners (c) Nursing Care (d) Dental and Periodontics Services (e) Diagnostic Laboratory Services (f) Residential Substance Abuse and Mental Health Facilities (g) Ambulance Services (h) All Other Ambulatory Health Care Services.

Healthcare services are one of the basic needs of human being. According to World Health Organization, millions of people follow an unhealthy lifestyle. Hence, they encounter illness, disability and even death. Problems like metabolic diseases, joint and skeletal problems, cardio-vascular diseases, hypertension, overweight, violence and so on.

Advertising is the most powerful medium of communicating with the present and prospective customers. Advertising is indispensable for sellers of products and providers of services. Advertising in business is a form of marketing communication used to encourage, persuade or manipulate an audience (i.e. viewers, readers or listeners; sometimes a specific group) to take or continue to take some action.

The commercial advertisers often seek to generate increased consumption of their products or services through 'branding', which involves associating a product name or image with certain qualities in the minds of consumers. However, the healthcare services can hardly be run purely on commercial principles and as such, there is fundamental difference between advertising by hospitals and by other commercial institutions.

The purpose of reviewing the healthcare services at local level helps to analyse and interpret the data collected into credible evidence about the advertisement practices adopted by them. Through a survey, the first-hand information is collected to get a clear picture of how healthcare services are promoted and advertised in a Tier-1 city like Kolhapur. The primary data was collected from selected hospitals through a structured



questionnaire and discussion with their administrative personnel. The data is analysed and interpreted to clearly understand as to how the healthcare services are advertised by the selected hospitals in Kolhapur city.

OBJECTIVES

The chief objective of the study is to analyze the opinions of OPDs and IPDs about the ethics observed by multispecialty hospitals in Kolhapur city.

HYPOTHESES

The study aims at testing the following hypotheses.

H_0-1 : There is no significant difference in 'Yes' responses of OPDs and IPDs to the ethical dimensions of advertisements carried out by hospitals in Kolhapur city.

H_0-2 : There is no significant difference in 'No' responses of OPDs and IPDs to the ethical dimensions of advertisements carried out by hospitals in Kolhapur city.

SAMPLE HOSPITALS

As per the records of Kolhapur Medical Association, the total number of all types of hospitals is 575. However, only following 25 hospitals having minimum 30 beds capacity were incorporated in the study:- (a) Dr. D.Y.Patil Hospital and Research Centre, Kadamwadi, Kolhapur (b) Aster Aadhar (c) Apple Saraswati Hospital (d) Western India Institute of Neurosciences (e) Dr. Kole Heart Institute Hospital, Kolhapur (f) Sai Cardiac Centre, Kolhapur (g) City Hospital, Kolhapur (h) Patki Hospital (i) CPR Hospital, Kolhapur (Chhatrapati. Pramila Raje Hospital) (j) Kolhapur Institute of Orthopedics and Trauma (k) Kelavkar Medical Centre (l) Apex Hospital (m) Kolhapur Cancer Centre (n) Krishna Hospital (o) Komal Hospital, Kolhapur (p) Masai Medical Foundation's, Shri Swami Samarth Hospital, Kolhapur (q) Eodhar Hospital (Mali Colony) (r) Morya Hospital (s) Lokmanya Hospital Pvt Ltd. (t) Metro Hospital (u) Siddhivinayak Hospital (v) Jaya Urology (w) Ashwini Hospital. (x) Shri Mahalaxmi Nursing Home (y) Siddhivinayak Nursing Home.

Medical profession is regarded as a noble profession and sustenance of its dignity and nobility is expected to reflect in all activities carried out by hospitals, including the advertisement of the healthcare services provided by them. Therefore, it is imperative to examine as to how far the hospitals adhere to the ethical standards while advertising. For



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that, a opinion survey of 10 Out-Door Patients (OPD) and 10 In-Door Patients (IPD) of each hospital was taken with respect to ethical dimensions of advertising carried out by hospitals in Kolhapur city. Thus, the total sample respondents arrived at is 500 (i.e. 10 OPDs X 25 hospitals =250 plus 10 IPDs X 25 hospitals =250)

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In all, ten variables describing the ethical violation with respect to advertisement by hospitals have been used and analysed, the result whereof is presented in following tables. In the end, all responses to variables, denoted as V1 to V10, are summarised and analysed statistically. The opinions of OPDs and IPDs are summarised and statistically analysed and presented in the following table.

Table 1.1

**Opinion Survey of OPD and IPD about Ethical Dimensions of Advertisement
by Sample Hospitals in Kolhapur City (N=500)**

Sl. No.	Ethical Dimension	OPD (N ₁ =250)			IPD (N ₂ =250)		
		Responses			Responses		
		Yes	No	Don't Know	Yes	No	Don't Know
1	The advertisement of sample hospitals increase anxiety about health/ life	140	95	15	130	103	17
2	The hostility about other competing hospitals is reflected in the advertisement of sample hospitals	105	140	05	95	143	12
3	The sample hospitals are lying about the features or benefits of the health-cares services provided by them	27	215	08	08	242	00
4	The sample hospitals are indirectly promoting the racial and sexual stereotypes through their advertisements	25	183	42	18	195	37
5	The sample hospitals are continuously portraying women in their advertisements in the role other than mother	70	173	07	73	175	02
6	The advertisement of sample hospitals are encouraging people to self medication	228	15	07	208	27	15
7	The innocence of children is used by sample hospitals in their advertisements	82	168	00	35	198	17
8	The advertisement of sample hospitals are apparently or latently false and misleading	90	135	25	80	143	27
9	The advertisement of sample hospitals are destructive to public decency	20	220	10	07	231	12
10	Prenatal determination of sex is indirectly advertised by sample hospitals	00	235	15	00	245	05
Total Responses		787	1579	134	654	1702	144
Total of 'Yes' plus 'No' responses		2366	---		2356	---	
Percentage of 'Yes' responses to 'No' responses		0.33	---		0.28	---	
Percentage of 'No' responses to 'Yes' responses		0.67	---		0.72	---	
Coefficient of 'Yes' responses to 'No' responses		0.49	---		0.39	---	
Coefficient of 'No' responses to 'Yes' responses		2.00	---		2.61	---	



Discussion:

The above statements indicate the violation of ethical standards pertaining to hospital advertisements. Therefore, the negative answers signify that the hospitals in Kolhapur city are adhered to ethical standards of advertisements. The above analysis show that the percentage of 'No' responses of OPDs to 'Yes' responses is arrived at 0.67 and that percentage of 'No' responses of IPDs to 'Yes' responses is arrived at 0.72. On the other hand, the percentage of 'Yes' responses of OPDs to 'No' responses is arrived at 0.33 and that percentage of 'Yes' responses of IPDs to 'No' responses is arrived at 0.28, which clearly indicate that hospitals in Kolhapur city have not violated the ethical standards while advertising their healthcare services.

Furthermore, the higher coefficients of 'No' responses to 'Yes' responses (i.e. 2.00 in case of OPDs and 2.61 in case of IPDs) than the coefficient of 'Yes' responses to 'No' responses (i.e. 0.49 in case of OPDs and 0.39 in case of IPDs) strengthen the conclusion that there is almost no violation of ethical standards by hospitals in Kolhapur city as regards advertisements.

TESTING OF HYPOTHESIS

At this juncture, it is imperative to statistically examine as to whether there exists the difference in 'Yes' responses by OPDs and IPDs and also in 'No' responses by OPDs and IPDs, with respect to above mentioned statements.

H_0-1 : There is no significant difference in 'Yes' responses of OPDs and IPDs to the ethical dimensions of advertisements carried out by hospitals in Kolhapur city.

H_0-2 : There is no significant difference in 'No' responses of OPDs and IPDs to the ethical dimensions of advertisements carried out by hospitals in Kolhapur city.

For that, One-way ANOVA test is applied and its results are presented in the following tables.

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Table 1.2

One-Way ANOVA test for 'Yes' responses of OPDs and IPDs (N=500)

Source	SS	Df	MS	F- statistic	P-value
Between-treatments	884.45	1	884.45	0.19425	.66465
Within-treatments	81958.5	18	4553.25		
Total	82842.95	19			
Result	Not significant				

$F_{\alpha, k-1, n-k} = F_{0.05} = 0.19425$, P value .66465

Since $F < F_{\alpha, k-1, n-k}$, H_0 is accepted i.e. difference is not significant. It may be accepted here that the 'Yes' responses of OPDs and IPDs to ethical dimension statements do not differ significantly.

Table 1.3

One-Way ANOVA test for 'No' responses of OPDs and IPDs (N=500)

Source	SS	Df	MS	F- statistic	P value
Between-treatments	756.45	1	756.45	0.16686	.68774
Within-treatments	81602.5	18	4533.4722		
Total	82358.95	19			

$F_{\alpha, k-1, n-k} = F_{0.05} = 0.16686$, P value .68774

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FINDINGS

Based on the study, the following findings about the advertisement practices followed by hospitals in Kolhapur city presented.

The hospitals in Kolhapur city have succeeded in properly highlighting the healthcare services offered by them and their specialities through advertisements. There is right communication of right message, which is a prime goal of any advertisement.

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The sample hospitals have succeeded in creating awareness amongst the people about health care than just building their brands.

Hospital expertise and care platforms with all the superior services are accentuated by hospitals in their advertisement

The hospitals in Kolhapur city have taken utmost care that they are communicating the message with truthfulness, dignity and social responsibility

Unlike other businesses, hospitals in Kolhapur city have never resorted to comparison of prices, services and facilities with their competitors', through advertisement. This has helped to avoid price-war and services offering-war among the competitors

Each hospital in Kolhapur city, irrespective of its specialty, has been following ethical standards in their advertising.

SUGGESTIONS

With an intention to address the hospitals in Kolhapur city about effective utilization of various tools of advertisement without breaking the ethical barriers, the following recommendations are made.

The hospitals should have a comprehensive website and use it effective advertisement providing all required and updated information about healthcare services and facilities. The care should be taken that the website is updated at a certain interval and adheres to minimum disclosure norms (MDN). The present-day customers (patients) are Google-hitters and should get the information of your hospitals when they search for best healthcare services.

The social media like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn may be skilfully used as virtual places to provide useful health tips and medical tips.

The system of taking feedback of IPDs on regular basis may be installed in the hospitals. This has advertisement value.

E-mails may be used as an effective tool of Client Relationship Management (CRM). Even after the IPDs and OPDs leave the hospital, the continuous rapport can be maintained with discharged patients through their registered e-mails. This would give an impression in their minds that the hospital is taking proper care of



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your health.

Messaging may be used for informing the patients about their upcoming appointments and follow-up.

The full-fledged patients-friendly Health Insurance Management System and Medical Reimbursement System would hopefully communicate a good message to patients.

The medium of advertisement should be properly evaluated before it is put to use. The prices of medical treatment and services may be reduced by decreasing advertisement cost by choosing cost-effective media and also reducing the frequency of advertisement.

The advertisement cost should be kept minimum and the utmost care should be taken that the advertisement cost is not recovered from patients, as commercial institutions do.

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- 1) Joey Leffel, 'Ethics in Advertising' E-Book – Ed. Jan-2014.
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