

Building Emotional Intelligence for Empathetic Communication: Labib Medical Center's Experience

"Empathy is the essential building block for compassion. We have to sense what another person is going through, what they're feeling, in order to spark compassion in us."

-Daniel Goleman

Effective communication is a crucial interpersonal skill. Working to enhance communication has many benefits in workplace. Building emotional intelligence and effective communication among staff in a hospital can enable for enhanced relationships with coworkers, managers and patients within the hospital.

Communication is the process to share information, values and feelings through sending and receiving verbal and non-verbal messages. Effective communication enables individuals to improve trust and emotional closeness facilitating the development of healthy environment. However, communication is complex and can be perceived differently from one person to another.

As for the emotional intelligence (EI), it is defined as the ability to perceive, recognize emotions and to generate them, to support thought, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth. EI is now considered an essential soft skill that plays a crucial role in human communication and is highly needed among staff working in healthcare. Many theorists affirmed that highly emotionally intelligent managers can communicate effectively with people.

Hospital improvement in patient safety requires healthcare professionals to progress from emotional unawareness to emotional intelligence. This will benefit the professional, the healthcare team, the whole organization and most outstandingly has the potential to improve patient safety. Daniel Goleman has described five central characteristics of emotional intelligence: self-awareness; self-regulation;

motivation; empathy; and social skills (fig. 1). Goleman concluded that more than 90% of the difference between high performers and average performers stemmed from emotional intelligence rather than cognitive ability.

Goleman's characteristics of emotional intelligence	How characteristic in healthcare professional could improve patient safety
Self awareness	Questions, decisions; in touch with emotions of self and others; asks for help; control impulses; has situational awareness
Self regulation	Controls and challenges emotions; resists the blame culture
Motivation	Altruistic ; manages own performance; work ethic contagious to others
Empathy	Understands and reads the emotional make up of others; able to facilitate group therapy
Social skills	Builds bond; able to operate across organizational boundaries

Fig.1 Goleman's Characteristics of Emotional Intelligence and Patient Safety (Adopted from Emma Stanton, and Douglas Noble BMJ 2010;341: bmj.c3781)

It is common that patients who need hospital services feel worried about their health and about what treatment they may have to endure. Patients can feel that they give up control of their lives and even the regular everyday activities they usually do. This can sometimes lead them to be somehow mean or aggressive. Responding to them with a caring smile and an empathetic listening is essential to turn the tough situation into a positive one. The ability to communicate effectively helps patients, their caregivers and staff to interact positively in the hastily working environment of the hospital.

The way that the health system delivers its care and supports services has an impact on the experience the patients have. Thus, if safe care and clinical excellence are the 'what' of healthcare, then experience is the 'how'. Starting with the patient, listening to their needs and designing the experience to meet those needs will result in

an environment where patients feel cared for and supported. Therefore, empathic communication can support patients to feel that they are listened to, respected as individuals, understood and acknowledged.

Having said this, Labib Medical Center (LMC) aimed at enhancing employees' emotional intelligence and improving their communication to result in fewer conflicts, better patients' outcome and hence positive patient experience. Therefore, a project entitled "Building Emotional Intelligence for Empathetic Communication" was started in July 2018. The project focused on raising employees' understanding of emotional intelligence and empowering them to interact with patients, visitors and each other in a caring and compassionate way. The project intended to improve patient experience and to develop staff ability to assess situation from another person's perspective.

identifying a number of champions to help support the initiative.

2. Launching a hospital-wide campaign to ingrain the empathetic communication culture across the organization.

3. Measuring the level of emotional intelligence among our staff using a standardized tool.

4. Executing a hospital-wide training entitled "حكيني من قلبك". Labib Medical Center has created the slogan "حكيني من قلبك" to inspire its employees for the proper communication and to inaugurate a culture for the empathetic communication.



The flow of the project consisted of the following:

1. Training a focused group (front desk employees) and

