MARKETING APPROACH TO HOSPITAL ACTIVITIES

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The use of marketing mechanisms in hospital activities created the need of developing marketing plans. They were necessitated not only by the increasing competition among hospital institutions but also by the need to improve the total system of their management.

Logistic approach to marketing research of hospital institutions

Health marketing can be defined as a study of the patients' healing needs, so that effective hospital services can be offered. It alters the overall philosophy of health treatment. Until now there existed a passive approach to health treatment: a given hospital provided a certain number of hospital services, including buildings, equipment and medical personnel. It is a passive approach because the specialized unit expects patients or summons them according to a priority list of waiting. In the first case there is a possibility of bad efficiency of hospital treatment, as there are limits to capacity in certain periods. In the second one, however, there exists an over-demand, which guarantees the full use of existing resources but, on the other hand, creates the problem of shorter medical treatment.

The active approach to hospital treatment is related to carrying out marketing analysis and the development of plans offering hospital services. It includes the following elements:

- Preliminary marketing studies. Depending on the character of the hospital institution: multi-profile or specialized, the demand and the expected number of patients to be treated are estimated. The research is based on statistical data from previous years, changes in the population’s health status, as well as primary and systematized information from pre-hospital treatment. All in all, the task of this research is to reveal the level and structure of the expected demand of hospital services. It is also important to make and evaluation in territorial aspect, as most frequently the hospital institutions are oriented in terms of territory with the services they offer.

- Marketing analysis of the data collected and analyzed regarding the patients' treatment needs. In greater details there exists evaluation of groups for specialized treatment and, more specifically: an expected profile and duration of treatment alongside with the procedures of their registration and the creation of a database for preliminary and further hospital treatment.

- Developing a marketing plan for the activities of separate units and hospital institutions as a whole. This is an instrument through which hospital care adapts its actions to analyzing the patients’ needs, i.e. their needs. The demand of hospital treatment is not so very dynamic and for that reason the marketing plan can be developed once in every 3-4 years. This is necessary even from the point of time, needed to realize the measures in the marketing plan and to receive feedback for the results from them.

- The marketing plan should serve as one of the analytical instruments to develop a hospital’s business plan. It is a broader approach to increasing the efficiency and quality of hospital care. Marketing analyses serve as a starting point for the introduction of some new technologies and decisions in specific spheres of health treatment. In continuation of this matter there comes the need to develop a human resources investment plan. It seems logical that the limited finance funding should be invested to medical equipment, which contributes to the more effective and qualified treatment of the planned flows of patients for treatment. On the other hand, the plan for human resources development should be
set on acquiring new knowledge and abilities, borrowed from advanced practices and hospitals.

All these facts reveal that modern hospital management requires the development of marketing research, analysis and plans for activity. This matter brings in a series of new practical questions:

First: What the study approach should be: centralized (carried out by a centralized system of hospital care) or decentralized, made by the personnel of the hospital institutions? Market practice and the character of hospital care take to the fore the decentralized approach as the more effective one. The smaller hospitals however can unite their resources for marketing studies and analyses.

Second: Who would carry out the research and analyses: whether they should be marketing specialists or medical groups? The combination of specialists is a good solution. The work of these crews should be assigned and monitored by the higher managing potential of the hospital.

Third: How can we accept the marketing plan? Simply by presenting a report from the crew charged with doing it or through a discussion with the managers.

**Analysis of hospital services and features of their study**

Through marketing studies one can outline the typical features of hospital services, which determine the model of their offering and usage.

**First:** The need of hospital services is as a whole non-elastic. This moment however allows planning of the hospital institution activities which is related to its efficiency.

**Second:** The needs of hospital treatment in some periods increase or decrease the search of health service.

**Third:** Hospital service is a complex enterprise in terms of offering and usage. This requires personal engagement, responsibility and team work in the suggested treatment.

**Fourth:** Frequently health treatment, especially operative one, does not end with active therapy in the hospital. It requires additional medical care which requires further relation with the treating doctor during the post-treatment period and consultations. This enhances the hospital’s market image.

**Fifth:** The necessity of personal health record provides fast information about medical treatment.

**Sixth:** The ill persons require the best quality of medical service, modern equipment, ethics of relationship.

**Seventh:** Various treatment of different diseases requires effective financing of hospitals by the health insurance funds, the clinical paths or diagnostic groups existing in world practice.

**Eighth:** The prices for medical treatment determine the hospital’s revenue and its ability to function as an intuition. The patient has no choice and becomes an easy victim to monopolistic interests of hospitals. It is for that reason that the mechanism of price setting is controlled by expenditure. That is why representatives of the National Health Cass, patients, health associations – doctors, pharmacist, dentists, nurses, health care specialists and hospitals – set the prices.
New approaches to develop better market plans

There are two new methods deserving attention when working on the marketing plans of hospitals: benchmarking and cluster analysis.

Benchmarking is used by hospitals to share the best experience, to analyze the existing working practices and try to find the best solutions.

Hospitals frequently use this approach in acquiring new practices, new equipment and techniques and methods of treatment. This is a perfect method for comparing marketing plans on national and international levels. Hospitals can cooperate between each other by establishing business relations with a number of partners. Still, they can increase their capacity in many directions and it is possible to become an object of cluster formations.

One: The research of patients’ needs is complex and requires the use of cluster activities.

Two: Competition creates non-formal cluster formations in terms of links: know-how for the personnel, permanent delivery of consummative goods, technical equipment, hospital buildings, etc.

Three: The development of marketing plan allows two or more hospitals to suggest additionally complementary production, distribution and communicative marketing activities aimed at achieving a wider range of offering or a broader efficiency of the services offered by them.

In conclusion, cluster analysis and benchmarking are necessary as their use in marketing studies and analyses can provide a number of possibilities for effective offering of hospital services, which would provide additional benefits for the hospitals and their patients.

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