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**The Role of Public Relations in Informing a Crisis Plan
for the Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital and the Broward
Health Medical Center in Florida**

Preparation

Mutaz Mousa Alotaibi



Abstract:

One major aim of this study is to determine how to manage crises in healthcare organizations most effectively. Another is to determine how to minimize the chances of disaster. I will analyze two cases to show the need for strong public relations and management in healthcare institutions. The first case is the handling of the Ebola patient by the Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital in 2014. The second is the leadership crisis at Broward Health Medical Center in 2016. The purpose of this research is to offer recommendations to healthcare organizations during crisis management by examining the possible impacts of crises on organizations. The findings of this study are important because they show the value of public relations to healthcare institutions. The analyses also show that if the two institutions had developed detailed crisis communication plans, their losses could easily have been mitigated. As I discussed in previous chapters, public relations can help a company create a public image and maintain public trust. However, because these two institutions lacked well-developed public relations departments, they faced problems. One major cause of problems during crises is poor communication or lack of communication. A public relations department can help in the formulation of a plan for communicating with the public before, during, and after a crisis. This can encourage the development of solutions faster than these institutions managed to do.

Introduction

The healthcare industry is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world and is brimming with opportunities for medical professionals, administrators, and public relations experts. However, it is facing a multitude of crises involving faulty equipment, the proliferation of infectious diseases, and incompetence at the medical and administrative levels (Lukaszewski, 2013, p. 157).

When crises such as the emergence of highly communicable diseases occur, it becomes almost impossible for health institutions to continue operating. Preparing for every possible crisis is important to prevent loss of time, resources, and public trust. The dynamic nature of the healthcare field, coupled with advancements in the industry, has brought new challenges to healthcare institutions' management of diseases. There are also new challenges emerging in the field, such as highly communicable diseases, lack of preparedness for them, and poor communication strategies. Diseases like Ebola have taken center stage among these challenges. The growing population and these health threats, whether predictable or not, show the need for better-organized crisis management (Panos, Dafni, Kostas, & Zacharoula, 2009). The way a crisis is managed can build or break the reputation of a healthcare institution (Merry & Runciman, 2005).

To show the importance of a good crisis plan, I will use the first Ebola diagnosis at Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital, in 2014, as a case study. The handling of this crisis raised many questions about the preparedness of American healthcare institutions to handle crises. Both private and public hospitals are guilty of being unprepared for such events. At Texas Health, several glaring missteps occurred. The nurses and doctors apparently had no clue about the

Ebola crisis, for instance (Goodman, 2015). The nurses who had contact with the institution's first Ebola patient, Duncan, became the first people to contract the disease within the U.S. By the time the hospital informed the public of the case, it was already in the news, and this complicated the issue further. According to Weinstock (2014), "Mistakes were made in the way Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital handled the first diagnosed case of Ebola in the United States." He says that health institutions ought to have communication plans to ensure the public is informed of an ongoing crisis. When a crisis arises, hospital leaders need to get the facts, be transparent, educate staff members, the public, and the media, and respond quickly.

Other crises arise from management squabbles and failure to use appropriate measures to mitigate a crisis. Communication is important for developing trust and goodwill from the public. If the management seems to be hiding things when a crisis arises, the public loses trust in both the management and the institution. An institution's failure to recognize the importance of communication can thus result in huge financial and reputation losses. A clear case is the Broward Health Medical Center management crisis. This institution, one of the largest public health systems in the U.S., attracted criticism for poor communication and for self-interest and lack of professionalism among its board members (MacDonald, 2016).

One thing is clear from both these crises: the lack of a well-organized crisis communication plan was the major reason both situations escalated. Had there been a detailed plan of what to do to mitigate a crisis, perhaps these situations would have been managed better.

Moreover, the leadership of both institutions failed in the management of these crises. At the Texas hospital, the CEO was unaware of the event until he heard of it in the news. The leadership did not take appropriate actions in time to avoid the patient's death, and they were not prepared to protect the two nurses

who contracted Ebola. By the time they contained the crisis, the damage had already been done. At Broward Health, there was a leadership failure in the management of resources and the payment of officials. The board members were unwilling to take responsibility, and this escalated the crisis to a legal battle (MacDonald, 2016). This lack of leadership cost the institution \$70 million in fines.

Objective:

One major aim of this study is to determine how to manage crises in healthcare organizations most effectively. Another is to determine how to minimize the chances of disaster. Other targets include investigating the causes of crises, suggesting ways to handle emergencies (Carayon et al., 2014), explaining why most organizations are unsuccessful in managing crises, and examining the effectiveness of public relations during crises in healthcare organizations. Most healthcare organizations experience serious medical problems, some of which harm patients, traumatize employees, or put the department's reputation at risk (Appelbaum et al., 2017). Therefore, the leaders of an organization should carefully maintain its reputation.

I will analyze two cases to show the need for strong public relations and management in healthcare institutions. The first case is the handling of the Ebola patient by the Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital in 2014. The second is the leadership crisis at Broward Health Medical Center in 2016, which led to the institution being fined \$70 million by the federal government for failure to follow guidelines and failure by the management to admit major shortcomings.

Research Questions

This study addresses two research questions: (1) Which strategies and tactics do public relations representatives apply for the effective management of healthcare crises? (2) How did public relations agents engage leaders responding to the Ebola and Broward Health crises to turn the events around and win back public trust?

Statement of the Problem:

Every business faces certain universal risks. Healthcare organizations also face challenges unique to their industry, such as outbreaks and management conflicts. Communication failure in healthcare facilities can have dire consequences, the most distinctive being the loss of human life. This unique situation makes it necessary to develop a systematic approach to crises in health care.

The role of public relations is to communicate with the public and to build and maintain an organization's image in the public eye. Guided by the Texas and Broward cases, I will analyze the benefits a healthcare institution can reap from a strong public relations department and the role public relations plays in managing crises. This research is important because it offers tips and insights for creating effective communication plans that consider the challenges facing healthcare institutions. The topic was chosen because the crises faced by healthcare organizations are unique, and it is important to help these vital institutions avoid the adverse effects of crises. This is a qualitative study conducted by bolstering theoretical arguments with facts, respected opinions, and secondary sources of information on other people's experiences with the issue.

Purpose:

The purpose of this research is to offer recommendations to healthcare organizations during crisis management by examining the possible impacts of crises on organizations. I will examine ongoing healthcare organization operations to analyze whether there are fundamental principles that can be applied to commercial institutions. In particular, I will determine how healthcare organizations use public relations to manage crises and which kinds of crisis require the intervention of public relations. This thesis will serve as a baseline for other researchers who are interested in the same subject and for establishing better crisis management plans.

Research Hypotheses:

H1: High-visibility tactics are the most effective way to manage crises in healthcare organizations.

H0: Crisis management will succeed if leadership skills and activities are practiced by public relations leaders.

Delimitation of the Study:

This study focuses on healthcare organizations in the United States and their use of crisis management plans. I will analyze two cases, the Ebola diagnosis in Texas and the fine levied on Broward Health. These organizations differ in size, which offers a range of perspectives but also limits the research in the choice of the size of organizations to examine. Therefore, the focus of the study will be on determining more general recommendations that can apply to other commercial organizations too.

The study concentrates on U.S. healthcare organizations and their emergency procedures. Such procedures vary by both country and organization, so the potential insights are limited to these specific organizations in the U.S.

Definitions:

The definitions of the main words involved in the research problem and others that occur frequently in this thesis are given to ensure easy understanding of the research.

Communication refers to the visual aids and channels against unfriendly or enemy interception for intelligence reasons (Adubato, 2008, p. 109). It is the medium that allows the establishment, extension, and maintenance of relationships. Anthonissen (2008) defined communication as the transfer of messages from one person to another so they can be understood and acted upon. Eder and Ivintzi (2010) defined *crisis* as an unstable condition of extreme difficulty or danger. A crisis is an unexpected situation with the short amount of time to act and which threatens the organization's high-priority values.

Lukaszewski (2013) defined *crisis management* as the procedures used by organizations in dealing with major unpredictable events that can harm them. Penuel, Statler, and Hagen (2013) defined *management* as the process of designing and maintaining the environment where people working together can effectively attain selected goals through planning, organizing, staffing, leadership, and control. *Public relations* refers kinds of planned communication inward or outward between the public and the organization with the aim of accomplishing particular objectives regarding mutual understanding (Dilenschneider, 2010, p. 93) For this study's purpose, public relations includes communication plans and actions that take place in managing a crisis.

Summary and Research Directions:

The above discussion introduced the idea that healthcare institutions face unique and complex challenges. If these are not managed well, they can lead to poor quality and delivery of healthcare. Various crises that have recently faced the U.S. healthcare system, including the two cases studies here. Healthcare players must design ways of dealing with crises that ensure the upholding of their reputation and public trust. The way these two cases were handled showed serious lapses in healthcare management. Public relations leaders can play an important role in communicating with the public and assuring them of safety in the institution before, during, and after a crisis. I will focus on the role of public relations in situations like the two case studies.

Literature Review:

The major problems in the U.S. healthcare system should be conceptualized from the perspectives of healthcare organization administrators, both people with business skills and actual healthcare providers. Healthcare crises can be very complex, and I focus mainly on the use of public relations in these crises and on recommendations for ensuring the continuity of business through them. This chapter offers an overview of various problems in the U.S. healthcare system and

solutions to them, mainly through crisis communication (Pan & Meng, 2016, p. 104).

Public relations offers a great way for healthcare institutions to redeem their images by developing communication plans. I will show how public relations could have been used to resolve the two crises I describe before they escalated. Developing a communication plan is the first step toward solving a crisis. Continuity is very important for any organization. In times of crisis, business tends to come to a standstill (Panos et al., 2009), but with a plan for solving the crisis, an organization can ensure that there are no hitches in its service delivery. Therefore, this study will focus on the role of public relations in resolving crises, guided by the two cases under analysis.

Sources

The literature used in this study is secondary data. The sources are published articles found through Seton Hall University Library databases. Several articles were used to analyze crisis communication in emergencies and responses by authorities. Others included guides to decision making and exploration of decisions by managers during crises.

Guidelines for Handling Crises:

Healthcare institutions need proper guidelines on how a crisis should be handled before, during, and after its occurrence. Ayers et al. (2016) provided guidelines to healthcare providers and institutions on handling crises and communicating in times of crisis. They outlined several kinds of crises that healthcare facilities can face. They also described the role of the media in crisis communication and how healthcare institutions should treat them. Preparing for crisis communication is a major determinant of the success of the communication (Ayers et al., 2016), and communication plans that highlight the areas to focus on are important.

Crisis management is based on communication. The 2014 Ebola outbreak in the United States was a crisis. Even though there were only two cases and the patients survived, Ebola was “ranked the third-most urgent health problem facing the country – just below cost and access and higher than any other disease” (Gillian, Robert, & Lasala-Blanco, 2015). The fact that Ebola was not well understood made a crisis communication plan even more necessary (Gillian et al., 2015). But instead of taking the matter seriously, most healthcare institutions acted complacently and avoided developing plans. If it had had a crisis communication plan, the Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital would have handled the first case of Ebola in the U.S. better.

Crisis Communication Strategy:

A communication strategy is a valuable tool for improving communication between an organization and the public. Greene (2015) analyzed Kaiser Permanente’s crisis communications and showed how important these strategies are for other crises. The institution had developed elaborate measures and protocols to follow during and after the crisis (Greene, 2015). Greene showed that there was elaborate cooperation at all levels of management in executing the strategy. The plan also highlighted the role of the media.

Aakko (2004) provided a well-researched account of how public health officials should handle risks. This article defined risk communication and analyzed key studies of risk communication in public health. Risk communication requires building trust, which health facilities must do by involving all their stakeholders in the development of a risk communication plan (Aakko, 2004). This article touches on the needs of government agencies to build their trustworthiness by communicating with the public in times of crisis. Public health facilities are not left behind in that. They should be at the forefront in informing their clients.

Great planning and steering of healthcare facilities depends on management.

Management has a major role to play in the progress and development of a health facility, just like in any other organization. When an institution faces a crisis or conflict, its leaders must solve it. Sometimes collaboration within the management team is impossible. Conflicts are bound to arise in organizational leadership. According to Al-Sawai (2013), “Conflicts can be a pervasive force within healthcare organizations and, as gaps in communication develop and are potentiated, failure in working practices can occur” (p.243). Poor communication is among the top causes of conflicts in management. It is important for a leader and a member of the management team to adopt suitable approaches such as compromise, collaboration, accommodation, and negotiation to handle conflicts.

Types of Crisis:

Anthonissen (2008) classified crises into two broad categories: non-violent and violent. Violent crises are usually immediate and involve the loss of properties, such as the burning of a part of a hospital and the loss of lives. There are other classifications that use eight categories.

Crisis Life Cycle:

Conception stage. Adubato (2008) said that this is the pre-crisis period when the features of the crisis are mounting, giving the management signals that the crisis is likely to occur. The crisis can be fully prevented at this stage with effective management of hospital activities and government intervention.

Birth stage. The organization failed to prevent the crisis, and now it has begun. The public is aware of the crisis, and the organization can no longer hide it. Timely intervention and creative measures should be applied here to minimize damage.

Growth stage. The crisis has matured and is escalating quickly. The organization is now attracting negative media attention that draws the interest of the public.

Maturity stage. The crisis has reached its climax. This situation is very bad

for the organization, and the management must take actions such as employing public relations professionals to address the crisis.

Decline stage. The crisis is responding to the corrective measures. The public's disappointment with the organization has settled, and the organization is coming under control.

The Need for Public Relations in Healthcare Institutions

Healthcare organizations face many challenges due to people's expectations and awareness of health needs. Thanks to the internet, news about a healthcare organization travels very quickly. In the twentieth century, public relations professionals had an easier time creating awareness and healthcare preferences because healthcare organizations enjoyed the sympathy and support of the public who were their customers (Corbett & Kappagoda, 2013). Today's public relations professionals must deal with various perspectives on health issues, the target market's needs, and financial aspects of health care services.

Managing negative publicity is a major problem in public relations activities today. Any crisis faced by a healthcare organization has a direct impact on its financial health and influences its survival. Because healthcare organizations are made up of systems of related elements, any disruption in one department can affect the whole organization. For instance, interference with the Affordable Care Act will affect access to health care for tens of millions of people. A poorly managed crisis can create animosity toward an organization, dissuade funders, lower morale among care providers, and drive away clients (Traynor, 2008, p. 1002). A well-managed crisis can earn the public's respect, loyalty, and sympathy and ensure the reestablishment of the equilibrium the organization's systems need for growth.

Insufficient Healthcare Organization Management

This study has also covered the weaker aspects of the U.S. healthcare system. Most of these are results of poor management, whether by the Department of Health or by healthcare facility officials, but they have led to the deterioration of healthcare provision, especially in the socialized healthcare system. A lack of management skills among health officials often leads facilities into crisis. A management crisis can arise and impede vital service provision. Poor management can lead to poor handling of a crisis and failure of the facility to fulfill its purpose.

Public Relations Tactics

Public relations tactic organizations can adopt to manage a crisis. Overcoming a crisis and continuing to engage in productive activities is critical to organizational success (Weller, Boyd, & Cumin, 2014). Crisis management is a strategy for removing various uncertainties and risks to let an organization gain more control over its destiny. A crisis management plan offers health organizations a systematic and orderly response to crisis events.

The impact of technology is being felt far and wide in healthcare. Public relations has played a major role in changing the way healthcare is viewed in terms of technology. The users of healthcare facilities must adapt to the technologies they use, but public relations can be used to inform them of changes in technology. A greater embrace of technology by Broward Medical Center's public relations departments could have played a role in overcoming their crisis.

Crisis Management

Lukaszewski and Noakes-Fry (2013) claimed that crisis management involves the solicitation of suitable steps to either control the adverse effects of a crisis or to prevent it altogether. It is pre-planned, preventive, and proactive in nature.

Crisis Communication Theories:

The communication between a healthcare organization and its vital components is an essential, open, and dynamic process for ensuring the organization survives. Systems theory postulates that organizations that operate as open systems enhance their chances of survival. A healthcare organization is made up of interlinked constituents hierarchically organized into the structural whole (Karabacak, Ozturk & Bahcecik, 2011, p. 258). These components can recreate and maintain themselves in response to environmental challenges. The open system enables exchange between environment and system, letting the system reduce entropy and maintain a steady state. This theory requires healthcare organizations to maintain constant interaction between the external environment and internal environment to attain homeostasis. The theory establishes a framework for the healthcare organization to enhance its potential for success during crises. Engaging in open system operation and collecting information from internal units and the external environment enhances an organization's ability to respond to changes and crises effectively (Bisgaard, 2009, p. 298).

Another crisis communication theory is information integration theory. During a crisis, the primary concern of the organization is to favorably influence the attitudes of key members of the public.

Research Methodology

Overview of the Study:

In recent years, the American health care system has gone through various transitions that have contributed to inefficiencies in maintaining quality of care. Moreover, the challenges faced in the healthcare industry have greatly contributed to the need for managing healthcare organization just like any other for-profit business with the aim of promoting positive outcomes (Hayes, Batalden, & Goldmann, 2014). This case study is designed to gain an

understanding of the use of public relations in healthcare organization crisis management and the way healthcare organizations respond to crises. The methodology was designed to examine two specific events to determine the best and most effective practices for informing a crisis plan for a healthcare organization and how it influences the organization's activities (Traynor, 2007).

Research Design:

To show the need for well-functioning public relations and leadership in healthcare institutions, I will analyze two case studies. The first involves the Ebola diagnosis of a patient at Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital. This case shows how the U.S. healthcare system needs to be revised to improve the timely and effective handling of crises. It also raises hard questions about the preparedness of healthcare institutions to handle the aftermath of a crisis and the need for communication plans. The second case study involves Broward Health Medical Center in Florida. This case lays bare the role of leadership in the management of healthcare organizations.

This research uses a qualitative case study methodology. This approach was chosen to gather, examine, and analyze contextual data. This methodology offers tools for studying composite situations in their contexts. This is a move that is focused on reproducible results that are not limited to a single aspect of public relations in the healthcare industry (Carayon et al., 2014). When this methodology is used appropriately, it can be a valuable scientific approach that enables the development of theories about healthcare crises and the development of effective recommendations for healthcare organizations on how to manage crises at the grassroots (Botha, 2007). It can also be used by individual institutions to study ways to mitigate crises and take timely actions to improve the provision of healthcare services.

This study uses multiple articles on two crises: the Texas Health Ebola case and the Broward Health case. These cases are related in how the crises affected them. I also compare them to determine how they used public relations strategies and tactics in crisis management to highlight the role of public relations in informing crisis plans for the healthcare industry.

Dataset:

The case studies involved collecting, organizing, reviewing, examining, and analyzing journal articles, reports, and books on the two events. Special reports on the Ebola crisis were also obtained from the CDC and Department of Health websites too. These items were obtained through the Seton Hall University Library databases.

Data Collection Procedures

All the information used in this study was publicly available and required no subscriptions or special requests. No surveys or interviews were undertaken as part of this study.

Analytical Procedures

The analytical procedures used to complete the study provided information on the events. The qualitative strategies of analysis included attempting to uncover the bigger picture through the use of data to explain certain phenomena. In striving to understand the information, I used documentary analysis (Traynor, 2010), which involves gathering information on past crises faced by the healthcare organization and reviewing their causes and effects to validate the facts. The analytic procedure of triangulating with the literature review in Chapter 2 is also used to validate the case-specific information.

It is important to adhere to the research methods and design to ensure the authenticity of a study. In Chapter 2, researcher employed a multiple case study design for the research to ensure that it met the desired outcome of the study. This design uses qualitative analysis to produce well-developed

recommendations for improving crisis management in healthcare institutions. I also analyze the findings and create a body of knowledge about crisis management and the role of public relations in it.

Public relations, as researcher shows in the following chapters, can play a vital role in redefining crisis management in the healthcare sector. The design, therefore, focuses on using the stated measures and methods to understand how crisis management can be handled by the public relations department of a healthcare system. Given the research design and its outcomes, it will be possible to draw conclusions about the use of public relations in crisis management.

Research Findings:

This chapter describes the analysis of the data and the findings that can be inferred from them. Data gathered from the research were analyzed using the stated measures in Chapter 3 of this study, guided by the two case studies. The data were collected from the available materials in the stated sources and thus could be analyzed easily. Most of the information sought was in regard to Ebola management (available in government sites) and management problems in healthcare organizations, guided by the possibility of developing a solution to crises using public relations departments. The available information on the preparedness of healthcare institutions for handling crises was also used. The sources of this information included journal articles, books, and reports on the topics in question, especially the two case studies.

Texas Presbyterian Hospital Ebola Crisis

In the Texas case, as soon as the public became aware of the Ebola crisis, the number of patients the facility received per day dropped drastically. The discovery that two nurses had also been infected did not make it any better for the organization, which was struggling to maintain its image. The net revenue fell by the same margin as the patients. After the discovery of the crisis, the daily

census for the hospital fell as low as 22.2% on average in October. The emergency room was put under diversionary status for ten days in October to allow for treatment. The first twenty days saw a decline in daily visits by 53.3%, and revenue collection for October dropped by \$8.1 million, a reduction of 25.6%. Furthermore, expenses of about \$6 million were incurred by December 2014 for legal fees, public image recovery, and preventing further cases. The data showed that the recovery process spilled into the following year as the management grappled for a way to salvage their image (Kutscher, 2014). The management seemed to be struggling to prove that Duncan's death and the infection of the nurses was unavoidable. However, this seemed to be too little, too late, as the damage had already been done. It is thus possible to observe the losses that the organization suffered in revenue due to the lost visits, in recovering its reputation, and in treating, screening for, and mitigating Ebola.

Broward Health Medical Center:

In Florida, Broward Health Medical Center faced another kind of crisis stemming from its management. The managers and board members were involved in personal quarrels—described as “cultural civil wars”—that affected the running of the organization. There were personal attacks, vendettas, and character assassination among the members of the management team, and they resorted to name calling in the media, showing openly that they were not united. There was also inappropriate interference by former board members, especially in the operations of the organization. When the information came to light, the facility faced a major crisis (Rosin, 2016). The public lost trust, as they saw the management as corrupt in its dealings with the resources of the facility.

They failed to fix this problem, and their lack of cohesiveness and proper leadership led to their being fined \$70 million over allegations of overpaying

doctors in a secretive compensation system (Sentinel, 2016). The report makes it clear that the management failed to provide leadership and guidance. Despite the opposition of some board members, the organization took actions “designed to enhance ‘the influence of senior management’s personal fiefdoms’ and . . . not the betterment of the system” (Sentinel, 2016). This crisis had various outcomes. There was a reduction in daily visits by patients, which led to a reduction in revenues. Other resources were lost in fines and in rebuilding the organization’s public image. The morale of the staff was also dampened, especially because they were also incriminated in the matter of their poor working times and the abnormally high compensation. Patients and physicians alike were frustrated by the management’s inability to solve the problems.

The institution had about 8,000 employees and 1,800 physicians. The first two months saw a decline of about 52.2% of daily visits and a drop in revenues of 24.4%. The institution also lost \$70 million to fines and more than \$10 million in mitigating the crisis. Another \$6 million was spent on legal fees and other matters related to the crisis (Donelson, 2016). Given the gravity of the case, some physicians resigned, and this led to further problems and losses to the facility.

The above findings can be analyzed to show the results of these events and how the organizations lost revenue and patients. Graphs should be used to show both losses as percentages. I will compare this with the previous performance of the institutions. It is, therefore, necessary to analyze the data for both facilities to make proper and informed inferences.

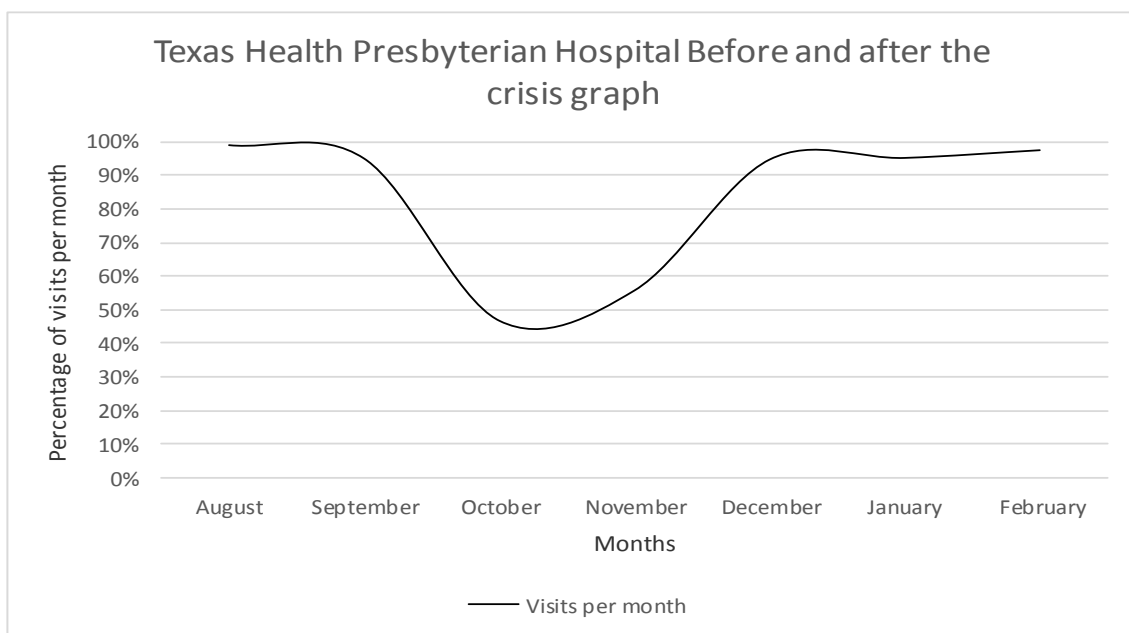


Figure 1. Visits per month to Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital before and after the crisis. Data obtained from the Department of Health and Human Services, U.S.

Figure 1 shows the reduction in the population served by Texas Health in the months before and after the crisis. Although it recovered public trust, the revenue it lost was significant. Showing the revenues in the same months would illustrate the real impact of the crisis on the facility's earnings.

In the above graph for Texas Health, a reduction in revenues is visible. This graph uses September as the basis of comparison, so September's revenues are set at 100%. After September, the revenues plummet before recovering. The revenues losses were due to the reduction in patient visits and the use of the funds to rebuild the facility's image and to cover other losses.

A similar analysis could be carried out for Broward Health, and it would show similar behavior. These analyses show us that the organizations suffered major losses in revenue, personnel, and public trust, which they later went to great lengths to recover. These findings were as expected because, during crises,

organizations make decisions to try to improve their situations. Therefore, even though the losses were imminent due to the crisis, it was necessary for the management of both institutions to take measures to avoid more losses. Crisis management by way of a plan would have been better for solving these crises.

Because the dataset was all secondary, there were no extremities or confounding data; the primary researchers had already identified those. This made it easier for me to sieve through the data as a secondary researcher. Had I used a questionnaire, observation, or interviews, the data would have been primary and could have produced extremities and confounding variables.

Importance of the Findings:

These findings are important because they show the value of public relations to healthcare institutions. The analyses also show that if the two institutions had developed detailed crisis communication plans, their losses could easily have been mitigated. As I discussed in previous chapters, public relations can help a company create a public image and maintain public trust. However, because these two institutions lacked well-developed public relations departments, they faced problems. One major cause of problems during crises is poor communication or lack of communication. A public relations department can help in the formulation of a plan for communicating with the public before, during, and after a crisis. This can encourage the development of solutions faster than these institutions managed to do.

Similar Studies:

Similar studies of crisis management and the role of public relations have been carried out for business in general. This is why public relations has become something businesses cannot afford to ignore. Alzahrani (2016) argued that “contact is the basis of Public Relations in crisis management.” It is true that public relations works by communicating and releasing information to the public. According to Alzahrani, there are three phases to a crisis: the pre-crisis,

crisis, and post-crisis stages. He argued that crisis management starts at the pre-crisis phase and ends at the post-crisis, and that public relations should be involved in every step of crisis management.

Cooper et al. (2015) developed another study of public relations in healthcare institutions. Effective communication is very important for organizations, especially healthcare institutions. The role of public relations is to communicate with the public about issues affecting the institution. During a crisis, a communication plan plays an important role in showing how communication should be carried out. A comprehensive communication strategy can allay fears and reassure the public that the crisis will be solved. But any communication plan enables public relations officials to know what actions to take in times of crisis. According to Cooper et al. (2015), a good communication strategy developed after the leadership crisis at Broward Health was pivotal to the institution's recovery from the management squabbles that had raged for months. The public could learn what was going on in the facility, and thus they trusted that the problems would be solved (Cooper et al., 2015). One aim of communicating during a crisis is to create an impression that the crisis is under control. Once this is done, it is likely to enhance the public's understanding and ensure that there are no gray areas.

There are many other studies of the role of public relations in averting crises, but these studies have not been directed toward healthcare institutions. Their findings were directed at various facets and categories of organizations, however, so they can be used as a basis on which the healthcare industry can develop public relations with crisis management and communication in mind. The industry could also use public relations to manage crises and communicate with the public about them by customizing public relations to its unique needs.

Similar studies using the cases of Texas Health and Broward Health are also available. One was done by Larey (2014). When Texas Health diagnosed the first

Ebola victim in the U.S., its emergency preparedness and its willingness to inform the public of crises were put to the test. The doctors had missed the disease, the patient died, and two nurses were infected by the time the crisis was blowing up. The public received its information through the media, which mostly provided them the correct details. It was therefore given that the public would trust the news from the media, because it was true. The institution's reputation plummeted, and patients chose other facilities for treatment. The fact that the facility had destroyed its image was evident in the number of appointments that were canceled. October saw a reduction in revenues by around 25%. The nurses went to the media and accused the facility of failing to train them to handle emergencies like this.

Throughout all this, the public waited for an explanation that was not forthcoming. After the crisis, however, the organization carried out a strong public relations exercise that helped it recover fast. When the management finally spoke to the public, the message they delivered was well-thought-out and quelled the fears people had developed over the few days of the crisis. However, the communication came too late (Larey, 2014).

According to Larey (2014), there are valuable lessons in the handling of the Ebola crisis. Transparency is important in talking to the public, the information given must be accurate, the media must be managed proactively while the duties of the institution are still upheld, and when mistakes occur, apologizing is not an option but a necessity. When the facility used these tactics, it was able to recover the trust of some of its patients.

Public relations departments are important for organizations in any situation. They are even more useful when used for communication before, during, and after a crisis. Keeping the public informed is an important task that stakeholders should always aim at. It is against this backdrop that Tomic, Tomic, and Lasic (2015) analyzed the role of public relations in healthcare. They

examined the ways public relations can be used to communicate' with the public about factors affecting institutions. They concluded that public relations can help institutions achieve mutual respect, build their public reputations, and create good images (Tomic, Tomic, & Lasic, 2015). Public relations and communication are therefore a necessity to healthcare and would have made it possible for Broward Health to overcome the effects of its leadership crisis earlier.

Another study of the role of public relations in crisis management in hospitals was published by Fatma (2014). She argued that a vibrant public relations department and public relations experts can play a great role in communication and crisis management in the health sector. Because all institutions face crises at one time or another, it is necessary to be prepared to fight, avert, or manage the crises, and this can improve a healthcare institution's relationship with the public: "The establishment of a public relations department or, if there is a public relations department, the employment of public relations experts are vital issues for communication in the health sector and crisis management" (Fatma, 2014). Therefore, she suggested a model hospitals could use to create a vibrant public relations department and develop a crisis communication plan.

Discussion:

The above analysis clarifies several issues. The Ebola crisis exposed the unpreparedness of the organization for such emergencies, which led to a questioning of the preparedness of health facilities. The role of public relations is very important in managing crises, and it can help ensure that the public retains or recovers its trust in an organization. From the two crises, it is clear that (1) transparency is important while handling a crisis, (2) listening to the public is important, (3) acting is important, and (4) public relations departments can take strategic steps to avert or mitigate crises. Transparency is important for the

organization, but it helps only when the institution is ready and informed of the facts. When disseminating information to the media, public relations officials must have the facts about the crisis so as not to be caught unawares, and must give the correct information about its status. For example, the first press conference Texas Health held was the right thing to do. However, it might have been premature, as the speakers didn't mention that Duncan had been to the hospital with Ebola symptoms before but had left undiagnosed.

Transparency is an important aspect of healthcare facilities. Lack of transparency about the Ebola crisis caused Texas Health to lose daily visits and revenues. It also lost public trust due to its failure to disseminate information in a timely manner. It regained this trust when it addressed the underlying problems and informed the public of how the crisis had come about.

The same can be seen with Broward Medical Health Center. It was not until management informed the public of the crisis that the public understood what was happening. Transparency was a factor in shaping the public's trust in the institution. Because the management did inform the public of the squabbles, that trust returned amidst the ongoing crisis.

Listening to the public is another factor that public relations departments and managers can consider for developing public trust in an institution. At Broward Health, it was important for the management to ask for public opinion before deciding on their course of action. It was already public knowledge that something was wrong with the institution's management, even if it was not clear what. The public thus needed to know what it was that was affecting the institution.

In the case of Texas Health, the public was aware that Duncan had visited earlier with Ebola symptoms and the hospital had not taken appropriate action. If they had listened to the public discourse, they might have taken the necessary measures when the patient was brought back. This is the power of the public and

what they already know. It is necessary for every organization to understand this and develop a way to communicate with the public so that the public can relay information to the institution that concerns it.

Acting quickly is also important when handling a crisis. Once an impending crisis is identified or one has already occurred, an institution needs to act fast. This is to allay public fears that the crisis will get out of hand. This can be made possible only by the availability of public relations strategies for handling crises. Texas Health managed its crisis by acting fast. This was instrumental in the aftermath of the crisis: the public began visiting the facility again quickly, as early as November, once they had been assured that action had been taken.

Fast action by the board of management at Broward Health played a key role in solving its crisis. Some members were laid off pending investigations, but change of management was necessary, and it helped the organization recover quickly even while its squabbles dragged on.

These analyses support my earlier discussion of the role of public relations in managing a crisis. They demonstrate that poor public relations communication will lead to a failed relationship with the public and poor management of information. All the information leaving an institution should be managed. Preferably, information from the media about the institution should be managed too. As such, a public relations department can play a major role in ensuring that the information the public gets is manageable, and when it becomes unmanageable, the public relations department can make arrangements to contain it.

Finally, if the public relations department understands its role in handling crises, a crisis can be easily resolved. And having a public relations department lets the management handle internal matters while other officials handle the information released to the public. This plan would be developed by the public relations department so it is ready to handle a crisis when one occurs. When

Texas Health used its public relations department, it handled its crisis much more easily.

The lack of communication plans in healthcare institutions is a worrying trend, given the impact that this lack can have on the day-to-day activities of an institution. It is important for organizations to develop such plans, which enable them to communicate and disseminate information to the public in time to avoid or mitigate crises. Further, the cases of Texas Health and Broward Health show how a breakdown in communication and a lack of management direction can lead to greater crises in the management and operation of an organization.

The same is true of Broward Health. Broward used its public relations department to communicate with the public and develop a communication strategy that helped it recover. It was also the public relations that improved the implementation of its report on an investigation when it informed the public. Once the public was informed, it was easier for management to be transparent in the implementation of the report.

Limitations of the Study:

This research faced various limitations. One was the way the analysis was carried out. The data used were all secondary. In addition, the research was limited to two case studies, so further exploration could not be carried out. The time frame of the study and the sample data were also limited in nature. Further, the research into the use of public relations in healthcare crisis management provided little information.

Recommendations:

The evolution of healthcare has created a need for public relations to be involved in various operations. Organizations that aim to be ahead must be ready to invest in public relations and stay competitive in the market. In that regard, public relations agencies should recruit healthcare employees to help them achieve their objectives (Carayon et al., 2014). People who work in healthcare

departments specialize in handling the internal and the external factors affecting healthcare centers, and numerous spectators in healthcare organizations require different kinds of expertise to improve the provision of health services (Appelbaum et al., 2017). The strategy would require different methods and language in messages for different audiences. Therefore, public relations is needed to address many concerns about healthcare.

Conclusion:

The above discussion shows clearly that public relations plays an important role in helping organizations communicate with the public about matters of interest. Whenever a crisis arises, public relations officers should be at the forefront in ensuring that the public gets the right information about how the crisis is being handled and the progress made in resolving it. This will help institutions maintain their public images. From the two case studies, it is obvious that had management followed the right communication plans and communicated with the public faithfully, the outcomes would have been very different. As we have seen, public relations enhances the creation of strategies for solving crises when they arise and communicating this to the public.

Communication is an important aspect of public relations in the healthcare industry. The public needs to be consistently informed of the measures taken to mitigate crises and the solutions being offered. It is also the role of public relations to prove to the public that the institution is worthy of its reputation. With the Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital, we saw that owning up to its failures, despite being late, did wonders to turn around the doubting public. This is clearly visible with the public relations department's first speech after the crisis: within two months, the company had almost recovered its daily patient visits. At Broward Health Medical Center, continual communication from the public relations department enhanced recovery despite continued squabbles in the leadership.

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