

## **Social Responsibility: policies and initiatives communicated by hospitals**

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**Abstract:** Social responsibility has become more and more visible in different and varied sectors such as finance, agriculture, garments, It has been spread all over the world through for profit and nonprofit organizations; among them organizations operating in the healthcare sector.

The implementation of social responsibility in this kind of organizations plays a big role not only for their stakeholders but also for the whole society.

We aim through this paper to show this role by investigating on social responsibility policies and initiatives communicated by ones of the most important healthcare organizations which are hospitals, despite their ownership type.

Addressing the issue of social responsibility in hospitals is an important step in the path of encouraging the use of resources responsibly.

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Date of Submission: 25-07-2018

Date of acceptance: 08-08-2018

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Over decades, many organizations have been embracing social responsibility: to reflect a good image; to meet or to exceed public expectations; to demonstrate a commitment to the society or to gain profit; whatever the reason behind, social responsibility has become for many organizations an essential part in their main activities and missions.

In the healthcare sector, “CSR is slowly emerging as a concept” (Takahashi et al.,2013), despite the fact of gaining importance in recent years.

Looking for a sustainable health service is a key issue for the benefit not only of the society but also the future generations, that is why this paper aims to give a comprehensive account of sustainability practices implemented and executed in a healthcare organization.

Hospitals as ones of the main healthcare institutions should not only rely on their social fiber; alongside their main missions, many of them adopt social responsibility activities, sometimes without knowing that it is related to CSR. “One of the most common ideas about CSR is that institutions tend to respond to all short- and long-term actions effects on the society and make sure that its practices are congruent with current societal expectations, emerging and future ones” (Quynh Lien, D.,2005).

In our context, nobody can deny the fact that all societies expect a lot from health institutions “to provide high clinical quality, high levels of functional quality, and cost effective patient care”( Xu, Y.,2014).Indeed we all look for : good treatment, extended care, patient welfare, respect, dialogue, dignity,... and it's among people's right, health is a central pillar in people's daily life, according to the World Health Organization, health is “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO,1946); as we notice, the social side is a major word in this definition, it comes in the third place after the physic and the mental people's well-being , moreover this definition has not been amended since then.

Moreover, many CSR measures are made by hospitals and communicated in different ways “communication is designed to operate not only on the image of the company, but also to provide public information, to explain and comment meanings, support cultural patterns and agitate”( Jurišová, V., & Ďurková, K,2012).

CSR communication is considered as an important management tool to interact with stakeholders. Hospitals deals with different CSR communication tools, and can also make combination between electronic and printed ones.

## II. METHODS

In this study, and in order to understand more CSR in the hospital context, we analyzed online content communicated via websites of hospitals worldwide.

A website is considered as an online institutional communication tool, where information is transmitted in a unidirectional way, but the purpose of some areas in a website is to interact-with the public such as: social media accounts, contact form, email,...

Websites with is a specific section about CSR make an interesting case for analyzing the various aspects of CSR in hospitals and that's our study target.

Despite the fact that each health system differs from a country to another (public, private, developed, less economically developed countries, etc...) we realized this study by gathering a sample of worldwide websites of hospitals with a specific CSR section, then we organized their CSR initiatives into categories.

## III. RESULT

These study findings provide support to theories about CSR in the health field, we classified the social responsibility aspects communicated by the studied hospitals -according to their importance-into the following categories:

### **The ethical side**

The principles of ethics differ from a country to another, hospitals tend to raise awareness of the patients and staff concerning hospital's code of ethics and preventing unethical practices.

The ethical behavior is important in any organization's practices, especially with aspects such as human rights, dignity, ...etc,

Besides the implementation of ethical conduct codes and regulations, adopted by the majority of studied hospitals, other actions are adopted by hospitals such as: creation of an ethics center; programming ethical training; following international ethical norms and obligations ; constitution of ethics committee "many teaching hospitals have developed guidelines for animal welfare in research and have even created specific ethics committees for dealing with these issues." ( Brandao, C.and al.,2013),.

Ethics is also mentioned in the definition of CSR by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (2000) as the "the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically".

Also for a fairer society, seeking some values is much demanded "In the health care setting there is no doubt whatsoever about the set of values that should be pursued: equity in access, universal coverage, and efficient resource allocation is the ethical platform of modern health care systems." ( Brandao, C.and al.,2013), there are also other values that hospitals tend to build with the society such as: nondiscriminatory policies for protecting cultural minorities, freedom of information, trust -" trust is probably the most valuable currency in the healthcare industry and it doesn't come easy"( Sherif Tehemar,2012),etc....these CSR values help hospitals be more transparent, responsible and trustworthy.

### **Charity and volunteering actions**

Hospitals are very active in terms of solidarity and charity programs, engaging in such activities help supporting local communities and also national and international ones. Some hospitals rely on sponsorship; others have established their own foundation to collect donations, among these initiatives:

- establishing specific programs for poor and people in need to access to hospital's treatment and medicine;
- helping rural people , people with disability, people with serious known diseases (VIH, cholera ,cancer),
- celebrating religious and national days with patients,...

Besides charity and donations, another traditional way of CSR is also present in hospitals: volunteerism  
Examples of volunteering actions: tours giving to schools and colleges, competitions for children about different topics: mainly health topics: like how to eat in a healthy way;, how to prevent sunburn/sun exposure; activities for sick children: such as drawing, painting, playing games, ...;contributing to natural disaster relief, etc...

### **Environmental sustainability**

Every hospital should contribute to environmental sustainability whether it follows a CSR policy or not; hospitals are ones of the major sources of healthcare waste: they generate products that contaminate the environment and pose health risks directly and indirectly.

For a safer environment, hospitals tend to deal with environmental issues, some adopt a waste management system that reduces the amount of waste and help ensuring its safe disposal, others look for cost saving by the use of environmentally friendly innovations as efficiency comes from the adequate use of energy

and natural resources, others seek the reduction of carbon emission, banning smoking areas, planting trees and constructing gardens and green areas,...

### **Research field**

Actions in the research field are also mentioned by some hospitals among CSR initiatives especially in financing medical research;

- sponsoring researches for some causes: like breast cancer;
- programming scholarships for professional development;
- helping educational university projects, cooperating with research organizations about health issues, etc ...

These kind of initiatives and others similar boost the scientific research of a country and help scientists and researchers investigate more and more in the health field.

### **Initiatives toward hospital's staff**

Hospitals employees seek like any other organizations' employees a peaceful and a successful work environment; studied hospitals are conscious about that and know that the satisfaction of their patients depends largely on their employees 'satisfaction at first.

That is why hospitals tend to create a collaborative work environment; to propose ongoing training and help their employees pursue learning and e-learning in order to motivate them, to help them develop new skills and to increase their efficiency.

There are also some solidarity recruitment cases like the example of a healthcare company in china; they have hired many disabled people and are even trying to recruit HIV affected employees on a trial basis"( Sam Lee,2012), these kind of actions inspire employees and foster their sense of belonging, plus this will play a big role in retaining employees.

When staff get involved into CSR initiatives made by their workplace, it demonstrates their responsibility and commitment, and they start also thinking in reducing their organization's costs.

Irresponsible activities are to be banned as well: forbidding discriminatory policies at work; conflicts of interest; "if a hospital employee continually witnesses violation of ethical norms in the hospital, he or she would not want to be involved with that hospital" ( Sherif Tehemar,2012),, that's why in some cases, many people start considering a hospital's CSR policy before applying for a job, which is a good sign of their degree of consciousness.

### **Initiatives towards hospital's patients**

Hospitals tend to earn patients' trust in the first place, that will have a big impact on their reputation and sometimes their budget, because saving money can help reinvest for patients and rest of the staff. In the private sector gaining patient's trust will lead to a permanent client/patient and offer a reputational and competitive advantage.

Besides cure and trust, patients seek many aspects that can be put under the umbrella of CSR such as:

-Equity in access "implementation of the principles of responsibility means creating an environment within the organization that will promote openness and fair treatment" ( Jurišová, V., & Ďurková, K,2012).;

-hospital's quality health care "in healthcare, corporate social responsibility means that there is an ethical obligation that requires hospitals and other organizations to do something beneficial in issues such as delivering quality health care to everyone who is entitled to it." "( Brandao, C.and al.,2013).

-Hospital's exposure to different cultures "the CSR component comes into play when the hospital take it one step further beyond just providing the necessary information to their patients but also connecting with various ethnic organizations or immigrant groups that represent the bulk of their patients and offer programs to support the patients, their families, and their communities in understanding the healthcare system" (Takahashi and al.,2013);

-Hospital's neighborhood welfare: improving the wellbeing of the local community by engaging programs that match the local community needs.

## **IV. DISCUSSION**

As mentioned above, results show variety in CSR actions in the sampled hospitals; it's not only about charitable stuff, as it comes to people's mind.

Communicated actions demonstrate that each hospital develop its own CSR in collaboration with its stakeholders, no common indicators on implementing CSR are giving ,each institution adopts its own policy, codes and rules.

These actions are listed as texts and/or reports, communicated data rarely include figures and statistics, the absence of encrypted data can make content less reliable.

Besides content, CSR section in a hospitals' web sites is mainly composed of : CSR contact, external links, stakeholders' categories, photos and videos of events, plus an important CSR communication tool "reports", it can exist under different designations (annual report, CSR report, sustainable report, etc...) but not all hospitals make reports.

As communicated before, the main concern of the paper is to study hospitals' online communication on CSR despite their ownership type, this experiment has shown that nowadays independent of their traditional roles, hospitals invest more and more on CSR initiatives "CSR is relevant and can be adopted by both for-profit and not-for-profit hospitals" (Takahashi and al.,2013).

Results reveal that the majority of studied hospitals' web sites with an entitled CSR section are private, for this category, CSR can be seen as a strong point and help hospitals getting distinguished, it can also engender competitiveness between hospitals and enhance their reputation.

Besides that, it can be considered as a responsible way to gain money ,to show stakeholders and mainly their patients that their money goes for their welfare.

## V. CONCLUSION

Current research on hospitals; with CSR policies communicated online, demonstrates how –despite their social fiber- hospitals have made remarkable efforts to be socially responsible. It shows to the world that modern hospitals don't limit their roles to treatment and cure, they go far beyond to the good of future generations, "CSR is not perceived as a fixed set of objectives, but rather as a continuous process of negotiation between stakeholders over time" ( Xu, Y.,2014)..

An effective communication of CSR activities is "an essential element in stakeholder management and a key in the development of CSR" ( Xu, Y.,2014)., information transmitted should be relevant, transparent and true, it is easier said than done, what is done in reality could be the focus of future researches.

Besides, hospitals could abide a new governance approach based on three pillars: equity, efficiency and quality ,“the balance between those values is frequently difficult to accomplish but, nevertheless, public providers try to be responsive to public expectations.”( Brandao, C.and al.,2013).

Listening and working with all stakeholders enrolled in the healthcare context will definitely guide humans to a better future “the concept of social responsibility implies that a shared vision of the common good is universally accepted among health care professionals, other stakeholders and the overall social matrix”( Brandao, C.and al.,2013), we can sit as example: lowering medicine prices is not a hospital action but a governmental decision. Social responsibility of hospitals is not a different conception of CSR, also “CSR should be seen as a key part of an organization's corporate strategy not just an add on”, it can also be a voluntary approach or a reply to a governmental request.

Understanding the key elements of CSR through communication will modify people's perception of the hospital, so besides the core of hospitals' missions, will appear other concerns –that already exist-and that stakeholders will be glad to speak and know about.

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Bouchra Jebari "Social Responsibility: policies and initiatives communicated by hospitalsIOSR  
Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS). vol. 23 no. 08, 2018, pp. 47-50.