
THE ROLE OF BRANDING IN THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM WITH SPECIAL REVIEW TO HEALTHCARE INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract: In healthcare, before visiting a healthcare institution, patients choose a hospital brand as a confirmation of quality based on their own experience, perception and brand recognition, as well as consultations and opinions from their friends, colleagues and family. Branding in healthcare is a relatively new concept and differs significantly from other activities because it mainly depends on the trust of patients. In the past, health institutions did not need to be branded because they did not face the level of competition they currently face. Today, the number of hospitals is steadily rising, while population growth and health focus are dynamically increasing health needs. The main goal of this paper is to understand the importance and need for branding in the healthcare system with special review to healthcare institutions, to prove how much the brand, ie the opinion of patients, is an important factor for the success of the institution. The conducted theoretical research deals with a topic that is always relevant for both healthcare providers (healthcare institutions) and users (patients). As a basic hypothesis set out in this research is that, the good image of the company significantly affects the success of the market, ie the good brand of healthcare institutions, has been proven to increase the number of patients and improve the perceived quality of service, increase satisfaction and loyalty. To prove the hypothesis, in addition to theoretical research, a survey was conducted that provides an analysis of the importance of the brand and its impact on the choice of healthcare institution, perceived quality of service, satisfaction, and increasing the number of patients and their loyalty. The research part - case study, is aimed at the company "PHI Sistina Nefroplus". A total of 40 respondents were included in the survey, of which 1 manager, 20 health workers and 19 random respondents. The survey was conducted in January 2020. As a research method, standardized survey questionnaires were used, which covered all groups of respondents, and the obtained results are presented graphically. The conclusions drawn from the research, refer to the importance and role of branding in the health system, the role of the brand for healthcare institutions and the impact of the brand on patients in choosing a healthcare institution. Hence, the importance of branding in the healthcare system for patients clearly emerges, as the main driver of any healthcare institution that directly affects the business strategy and revenue generation. It is also a significant competitive advantage that is achieved with a difference, and the only strategy that the competition cannot imitate is the difference in the created brand.

Keywords: healthcare system, healthcare institutions, brand.

1. INTRODUCTION

The right to health and healthcare is a basic and global human right. States have a general obligation to protect their citizens and to provide them with adequate healthcare when they need it (Kamcev, N., Angelovska, B., Kamceva, G., & Richte, K., 2010). The protection of patients' rights defines the right to be informed, as well as the right to choose and participate in decision-making. Hence, patient-oriented marketing and branding in the healthcare system are gaining an increase application (Buckley, T. P., 2009). Nowadays, as a result of increasing competition, the health care delivery system is becoming much more complicated. All health institutions seem to be identical in terms of their offered health standard, which created a prerequisite for creating a brand of health institutions (Sirisha, B., & Kishore B. M. , 2014). The brand, as a tool to support communication with patients, acts on the

perception in the consciousness of patients, as well as the general public. The brand creates a lasting impression, through which it establishes a relationship with patients and creates loyal patients, important for the competitiveness of a healthcare institution. Branding in the healthcare sector and healthcare institutions is significantly different from other industries, as it mainly depends on the trust of patients. By establishing a strong brand image, the frequency of patients in the healthcare institution increases. Branding in healthcare facilities is done in order to remind patients of the services offered to them, as well as the service provider through the basic benefits, tangible and intangible. For a healthcare institution to succeed in the healthcare business, they must position themselves strongly so as to create respect and influence over others in the sector (Gomes, A. B. T. L., 2018). For that purpose, healthcare providers must focus their attention on meeting the needs of patients by providing services of significant value, which are different from competitors and which are difficult to imitate. Brands can give a unique meaning to patients, and such meaning and personal experience with the brand create an emotional connection between patients and the brand. Healthcare is an intimate experience and emotions play an integral role in decision making related to choosing a healthcare institution (Kemp, E., 2014). Mainly, branding is a valuable intangible asset of any company that is created by long-term, persistent and hard work. It is a promise that speaks for the company, therefore it is necessary to ensure its legal protection and trademark registration.

2. METHODOLOGY

The theoretical research was conducted in the period between September 2019 and April 2020, in an attempt to define the importance of branding in the healthcare system with special review to healthcare institutions. Keywords such as healthcare system, healthcare institutions, hospitals and healthcare combined with keywords such as brand and branding were researched using PubMed and Google Scholar.

The investigative part - a case study, was directed at the company "PHI Sistina Nefroplus". As a research method, standardized survey questionnaires were used, which covered all groups of respondents. The survey included a total of 40 respondents, of which 1 manager, 20 health professionals and 19 random respondents. The survey was conducted in January 2020.

2.1. Survey

The survey was conducted with a closed questionnaire, in this way the answers can be directly compared from respondent to respondent. A big advantage of this method is that it allows speed in data collection. The obtained and processed results are graphically presented and contribute to the setting of the conclusions from the work.

3. RESULTS

Theoretical research indicates the importance and need for branding in the healthcare system with special review to healthcare institutions, as well as the impact of the brand of healthcare institutions on the quality of service, satisfaction and loyalty of patients.

The brand of a healthcare institution is a set of beliefs, ideas and impressions that the patient has towards the institution. The brand in the healthcare system has a strategic function. Thus, a positive attitude towards the brand helps the intentions that patients have when choosing a healthcare institution. In addition to meeting the needs of the patient, quality must be the main concern of every institution. Operationally, the quality of service depends on the balance of perceptions and expectations of patients. Patient satisfaction with medical services depends on the extent to which the patient's expectations are met. For healthcare institutions, satisfied patients are especially important because, undoubtedly, patient satisfaction is a passport to profitability in the healthcare industry. Loyalty is a positive inclination towards a brand. Whether the discussion focuses on the patient, loyalty in the context of healthcare, or customer loyalty in the general context of service, there is no doubt that the same benefits of customer loyalty apply to healthcare institutions. Hence, patient loyalty acts as a competitive tool for healthcare institutions (Wu, C-C., 2011).

The research part - a case study, in the form of a survey was conducted on 40 respondents on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia.

PHI Dialysis Center "Sistina Nefroplus", the healthcare service of specialist- consultative healthcare - hemodialysis, is performed in 10 dialysis centers. In the PHI Dialysis Center "Sistina Nefroplus" in 2017 the total number of patients was 492 which is 56 patients more than the number of patients in 2015 (Figure 1.).

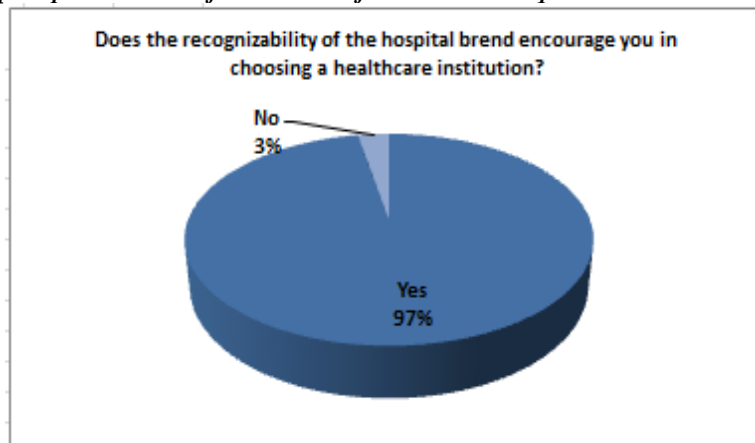
Figure 1. Number of patients 2015-2017 in PHI Dialysis Center "Sistina Nefroplus".
Number of patients 2015-2017 in "Sistina Nefroplus"



By analyzing the data from the questionnaire, the following results were obtained:

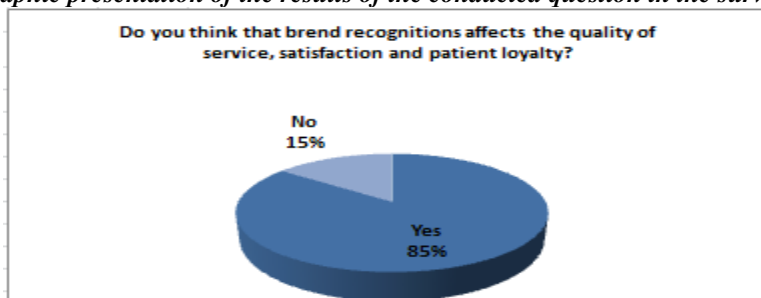
- To the question: Have you ever heard of PHI "Sistina Nefroplus"? - 85% of the respondents answered positively, while 15% of the respondents had never heard of the brand "Sistina Nefroplus".
- To the question: Have you ever used services in PHI "Sistina Nefroplus"? - Since it is a healthcare institution with specialized activity, dialysis, only 6% of the respondents used services in PHI "Sistina Nefroplus", 35% did not use services, but if they needed they would use them and 59% answered that they did not use services of PHI "Sistina Nefroplus".
- To the question: What is your opinion about the quality of services offered in PHI "Sistina Nefroplus"? - 82% of the respondents answered that they have a positive opinion about the quality of the services offered in PHI "Sistina Nefroplus", 18% have not formed an opinion and no one answered that the opinion is negative.
- To the question: On what basis do you form your opinion about the brand "Sistina Nefroplus"? - 53% of the respondents answered that they form the opinion about the brand "Sistina Nefroplus" on the basis of recognition, 32% answered that they form the opinion about the brand on the basis of experience, while 3% on the basis of someone else's opinion. 12% answered with another.
- To the question: Does the recognizability of the hospital brand encourage you in choosing a healthcare institution? - 97% of the respondents answered that the recognizability of the brand encourages them in choosing a healthcare institution, only 3% answered negatively to this question (Figure 2.).

Figure 2. Graphic presentation of the results of the conducted question in the survey questionnaire



- To the question: Do you think that brand recognition affects the quality of service, satisfaction and patient loyalty? - 85% answered that the recognition of the brand depends on the quality of service, satisfaction and loyalty of patients. The remaining 15% of the respondents answered negatively (Figure 3.).

Figure 3. Graphic presentation of the results of the conducted question in the survey questionnaire



- To the question: Do you think that the brand "Sistina Nefroplus" is recognizable and competitive on the market of Republic of North Macedonia? - 91% of the respondents who know the brand "Sistina Nefroplus", consider that it is recognizable and competitive on the market of Republic of North Macedonia, only 9% believe that this brand is not sufficiently recognizable and competitive on the market.
- To the question: Which factor in your opinion is the most important when choosing a health institution? - 82% of the respondents answered that the quality of service for them is the most important factor for them when choosing a healthcare institution, 12% answered that it is the image of the company and only 6% answered that the price of the service for them is one of the most important factors in choosing healthcare institution.
- To the last question: Do you think that PHI Dialysis Center "Sistina Nefroplus" has a good image? - 94% of the respondents answered that the brand "Sistina Nefroplus" has a good image, only 6% answered negatively to this question.

4. DISCUSSIONS

Analyzing the results of the conducted theoretical research as well as the conducted survey questionnaire addressed to the company PHI Dialysis Center "Sistina Nefroplus", through discussion we will try to prove the hypothesis.

Hypothesis: The good image of the company significantly affects the success of the market, ie the good brand of healthcare institutions, proven to contribute to increasing the number of patients and improving the perceived quality of service, increasing satisfaction and loyalty.

The main task of healthcare marketing is to satisfy the interests of patients. The results of the theoretical research indicate the importance and role of branding in the healthcare system, the importance of the brand of healthcare institutions, as well as the impact of the brand on patients when choosing a healthcare institution. The purpose of branding in the healthcare system is to provide a significant competitive advantage that is achieved by difference, and the only strategy that the competition can not imitate is the difference in the created brand.

Regarding the brand "Sistina Nefroplus", despite the fact that it is a healthcare institution with specialist activity, dialysis, from the survey questionnaire we can conclude that this brand is quite well known in the market of Republic of North Macedonia. That is, 85% of the respondents answered that they have heard of this brand, and only 15% or 6 respondents have never heard of the brand "Sistina Nefroplus". As mentioned above, it is a healthcare institution with specialist activity, dialysis, most of the respondents did not use the services of "Sistina Nefroplus", and many of them answered that if they needed they would use the services of this brand. When asked about their opinion on the quality of services offered in "Sistina Nefroplus", 82% of respondents answered positively, and most of them, ie even 53% formed their opinion about the brand "Sistina Nefroplus" as a result of recognizability. 97% of the respondents answered that brand recognition encourages them in choosing a healthcare institution and even 85% believe that brand recognition affects the quality of service, satisfaction, increasing the number and loyalty of patients. Above in the text of this paper, Figure 1 shows that the number of patients in PHI "Sistina Nefroplus" in the period from 2015 to 2017 increased by 56 patients. Most of the respondents answered that the quality of service according to them is the most important factor in choosing a health care institution, and supported by the theoretical research we did, we proved that there is no good brand without good quality service and meeting patient expectations, which means that these two things are closely related. At the very end, 91% of the respondents answered that the brand "Sistina Nefroplus" is recognizable and competitive on the market of Republic of North Macedonia and 94% of the respondents think that "Sistina Nefroplus" has a good image.

From the survey questionnaire we can see that the brand recognition contributes to the increase in the number and loyalty of Sistina Nefroplus patients. In general, the good image of the company significantly affects the success of the market, in this context we can say that branding in the healthcare system and the recognition of a good brand,

proven to contribute to increasing the number of patients and improving service quality, satisfaction and loyalty, which is set as the basic hypothesis in this research.

5. CONCLUSIONS

From the prepared work, the importance of branding in the healthcare system as a basic driver of every healthcare institution that directly affects the business strategy and revenue generation clearly emerges. The brand guarantees benefits for both the healthcare institution and the patients, ie:

- Creates a competitive advantage
- Affects the improvement of the financial status of healthcare institutions
- Guarantees the quality of services
- Creates emotional connection of patients to the brand of the healthcare institution
- Allows the creation of marketing strategies

The good brand of healthcare institutions has proven to serve as a leading factor for improving market success, ie it contributes to increasing the number of patients and improving the quality of service, satisfaction and patient loyalty. As a result of it, it is proposed that managers in healthcare institutions strive to create and maintain a good and recognizable brand.

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