

Empathy Mapping – A Novel Approach in Staff Training

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Abstract

Empathy is the foundation of patient-centered care. However, empathy levels among healthcare professionals are currently suboptimal. This paper presents a novel approach to staff training using empathy mapping, a tool that helps to visualize and understand the thoughts, feelings, actions, and observations of patients. The paper describes the activity and result of the project, which was implemented in an oncology department of a hospital. The paper also shows how empathy mapping can improve patient experience and care, as well as staff satisfaction and empathy skills.

Background

Empathy is the foundation of patient-centered care. However, empathy levels among health care professionals are currently suboptimal.¹ The ability of healthcare givers to display empathy has been positively associated with three outcomes of patient care. The first is treatment outcomes for patients, such as reducing pain and anxiety. The second is patient adherence via the facilitation of information exchange, the growth of interpersonal trust, and a sense of partnership. The third outcome is patient satisfaction.²

A recent study conducted within an oncology department revealed that patients often perceive healthcare professionals as being detached and failing to seize opportunities for empathetic interactions. This prompted the development of an innovative training module centered around empathy mapping.

Goal

This project aimed to improve patient experience by at least 60% by using empathy maps during staff training. The following two main objectives were kept in mind:

- Identify and address pain points: Identify common pain points in the patient experience through empathy mapping, and develop targeted interventions and process improvements to address these issues.
- Provide ongoing training and support: Establish a framework for ongoing staff training and support in utilizing empathy maps to ensure continuous improvement in staff perspective and patient care.

Method

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of empathy mapping in staff training to improve patient experience and care in an oncology department of a hospital. The study was guided by the following research questions:

- How does empathy mapping impact the staff's perspective and behavior toward patients?
- How does empathy mapping affect patient satisfaction and experience with the hospital staff and services?
- How does empathy mapping influence staff satisfaction and engagement with their work and colleagues?

Design and Procedures

The study employed a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. The study consisted of three phases: pre-training, training, and post-training.

- **Pre-training phase:** The pre-training phase involved conducting a baseline survey with a group of oncology patients (n = 100) to measure their satisfaction and experience with the hospital staff and services. The survey used a 5-point Likert scale to assess various aspects of patient experience, such as communication, empathy, respect, trust, and support. The pre-training phase also involved conducting a baseline assessment with a group of oncology staff (n = 50), including doctors, technicians, and nurses. The assessment used a self-report questionnaire to measure the staff's empathy skills, satisfaction, and engagement.

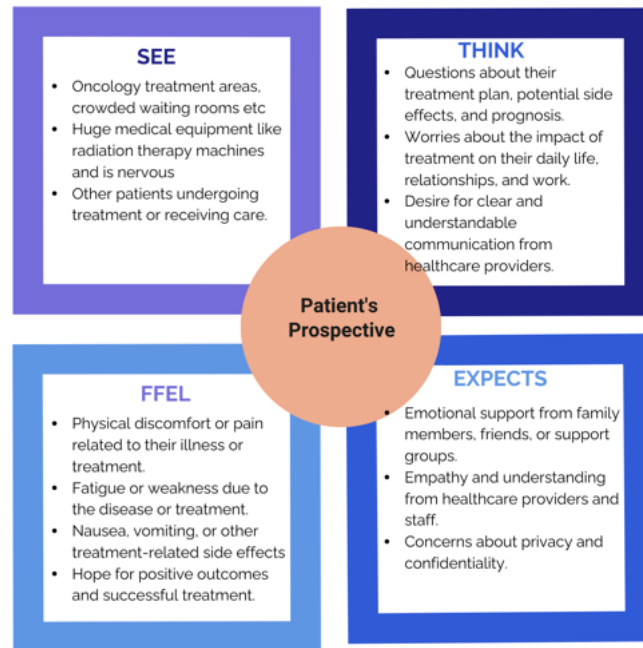


Fig 1: Empathy Map

- **Training phase:** The training phase involved implementing a comprehensive training program on using empathy maps in staff training. The training program was developed based on the project goals and research findings, as well as external experts' guidance. The training program consisted of four sessions, conducted by experienced facilitators who guided the participants through the following steps:
 - Introduction: The facilitators introduced the concept and purpose of empathy mapping, as well as the expected outcomes and benefits of the training.
 - Patient journey: The facilitators presented a typical patient journey in the oncology department, highlighting the key touch points and interactions between patients and staff.
 - Empathy mapping: The facilitators explained how to use empathy maps to visualize and understand the thoughts, feelings, actions, and observations of patients at each touch point. The facilitators also provided feedback and support to the groups as they worked on their empathy maps.
 - Interactive activity: The facilitators conducted an interactive activity to reinforce the learning outcomes of the training. The activity involved role-playing scenarios where participants had to apply their empathy skills in simulated patient-staff interactions.
- **Post-training phase:** The post-training phase involved conducting a follow-up survey with the same group of oncology patients (n = 100) to measure their satisfaction and experience with the hospital staff and services after the training intervention. The survey used the same instrument as the pre-training survey but also included additional questions to assess the impact of empathy mapping on patient care. The post-training phase also involved conducting a follow-up assessment with the same group of oncology staff (n = 50) to measure their empathy skills, satisfaction, and engagement after the training intervention. The assessment used the same instrument as the pre-training assessment but also included additional questions to evaluate the effectiveness of empathy mapping on staff perspective.

Data Analysis

The study used both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the quantitative data from the surveys and assessments. The study compared the mean scores of patient satisfaction and experience, as well as staff empathy skills, satisfaction, and engagement before and after the training intervention.

Results

The project resulted in several benefits for staff, patients, stakeholders, etc. Some of these benefits are:

- **Increased patient satisfaction scores:** By incorporating empathy maps into staff training, a 46% growth was observed in the patient experience index.
- **Enhanced staff empathy skills:** Staff members who underwent empathy map training demonstrated improved empathy skills in their interactions with patients. This was assessed through peer assessments and mystery audits.
- **Reduced patient complaints:** Staff members became more empathetic and patient-centered in their approach, resulting in a decrease in patient complaints. The number of patient complaints was reduced by 78%.
- **Positive staff satisfaction:** 83% of staff in the Oncology Department gave positive feedback on the training methodology and how it has helped them improve patient communication. It resulted in improved staff engagement, reduced burnout, and better staff-patient interactions.

Conclusion

Staff found the empathy map training engaging, perceived value in it, and exhibited changes in perspective as a result of the training. The result showed that empathy maps could be a useful training tool for caregivers to develop a more empathetic approach to patient care. This project clearly demonstrates how empathy mapping can be a novel and effective approach in staff training to improve patient experience and care. It also shows how innovation can be achieved by using simple and accessible tools that can make a difference in the lives of both patients and staff.

References

1. Siricharoen, W.V. (2021). Using Empathy Mapping in Design Thinking Process for Personas Discovering. In: Vinh, P.C., Rakib, A. (eds) Context-Aware Systems and Applications, and Nature of Computation and Communication. ICCASA ICTCC 2020 2020. Lecture Notes of the Institute for Computer Sciences, Social Informatics and Telecommunications Engineering, vol 343. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67101-3_15
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