PATIENT COMPLAINTS

The development of a new classification tool for communication-related patient complaints

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BACKGROUND

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Approximately 3000 health professionals at "Lillebaelt Hospital" in Denmark have undergone a communication program which aims at improving the health professionals' communication skills and self-efficacy. One of the expected effects of the program is to detect a decrease in the number of communication-related patient complaints.

When using the existing classification system, an average of 10% of the complaints are being categorized as communication-related. However, a spot check of 10 random complaints revealed that no less than 8 of these included communication issues.

The purpose of this study is therefore to develop a new classification tool with an improved sensibility in identifying communication-related issues in patient complaints.

METHODS

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All patient complaints from 2012 (n=155) were subject to a content analysis in order to identify the main communication themes through which a classification tool was developed:

Step 1	**Step 2**	**Step 3**	**Step 4**	**Step 5**
Independent read through of 155 patient complaints by two independent researchers	Discussion of each complaint, reaching for agreement on the categorization	Second independent read through, finding common themes and thematic categorization	A search through the complaints for 3 citations that would characterize each theme	Three independent researchers read through 50 randomly selected complaints of the 155, categorizing them using the new codebook

RESULTS

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The systematic analysis of all of the patient complaints from 2012 (n=155) showed that at least 57% of these either originated from or were related to communication issues.

6 main communication themes related to the communication program were identified:

Theme	Percentage
Theme 1	18,6%
Theme 2	4,6%
Theme 3	38,6%
Theme 4	40,6%
Theme 5	4,6%
Theme 6	13,6%
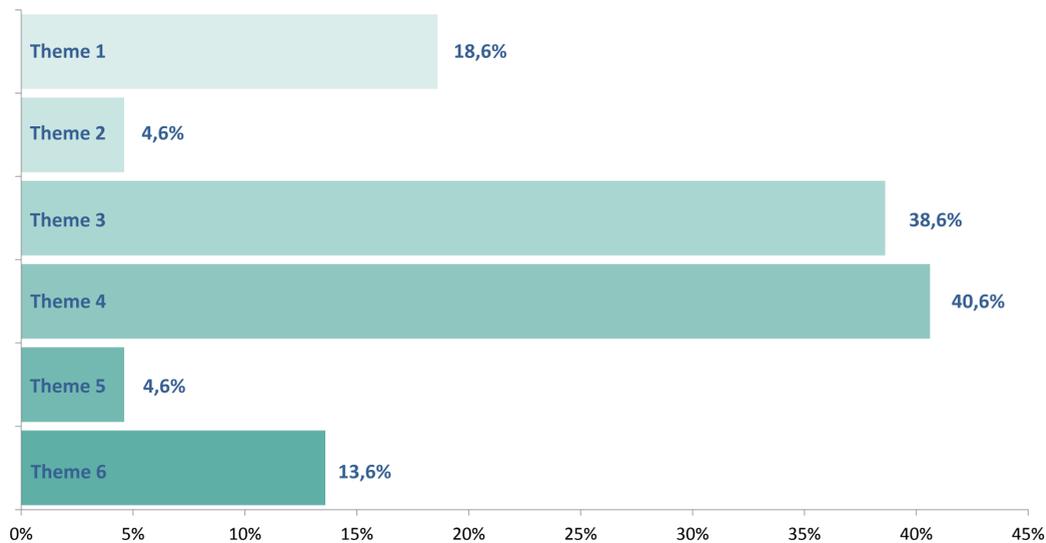
Theme 1: Lack of situational awareness

Theme 2: No contact with the health professional (nonverbal communication)

Theme 3: Misinformation, divergent information or lack of information

Theme 4: The patient does not feel understood, heard or taken seriously

Theme 5: Language issues

Theme 6: Offensive communication and attitude

NEXT STEP

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All of the complaints from 2013, 2014 and 2015 will be coded by two independent researchers using the new classification tool. The result will be compared to the outcome from 2012 (57%) in order to determine if there is a decrease in the number of communications-related patient complaints.

DISCUSSION

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An exchange of experiences with the development of a classification tool of any sort.

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