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## MEDIATING ROLE OF EMPATHY BETWEEN SERVICE COMMUNICATION AND PATIENT SATISFACTION IN CALAMBA CITY HEALTHCARE CUSTOMER RELATIONS OFFICES

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined service communication, empathy, and patient satisfaction in Customer Relations Offices (CROs) of selected healthcare institutions in Calamba City, Laguna, including five private and one public hospital. Using a quantitative descriptive-correlational design with mediation analysis, the research explored the relationships among these variables and tested whether empathy mediates the effect of service communication on patient satisfaction. Data were gathered from 150 patients through a structured, validated questionnaire utilizing a four-point Likert scale, which demonstrated high reliability (Cronbach's alpha > 0.70).

Results showed that service communication was generally manifested (mean = 2.73), with strengths in clarity, professionalism, and courteous interactions, though responsiveness and procedural explanations need improvement. Empathy was moderately manifested (mean = 2.63), reflecting respectful and personalized care but less consistent emotional validation. Patient satisfaction was rated as satisfied (mean = 2.98), with strong loyalty and recommendation intentions.

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Regression analysis revealed that service communication significantly predicts both empathy ( $\beta = 0.887, p < .001$ ) and patient satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.561, p < .001$ ), while empathy is a strong predictor of satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.710, p < .001$ ). The Sobel test confirmed that empathy partially mediates the relationship between service communication and patient satisfaction.

Findings highlight the importance of strengthening communication and empathetic engagement to enhance patient experiences and trust. The proposed action plan includes communication protocols, emotional intelligence training, standardized practices, and continuous monitoring through feedback and performance assessment to sustain service quality improvements.

**Keywords:** *service communication, empathy, patient satisfaction, mediation analysis; customer relations offices, Calamba City hospitals*

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## INTRODUCTION

Healthcare institutions are increasingly recognized not only as providers of medical treatment but also as service organizations responsible for delivering positive patient experiences. In modern healthcare systems, quality of care is measured not only through clinical outcomes but also through patients' perceptions of the services they receive. Patients expect accurate treatment along with professionalism, clear communication, and compassionate interaction. Thus, healthcare providers must effectively manage both clinical and service aspects to achieve high patient satisfaction.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3 promotes universal health and well-being, a target supported globally by the continuous improvement of healthcare quality. This goal emphasizes patient-centered care, which includes respectful communication, responsiveness, and emotional support. These elements are essential in building trust and addressing both the patients' medical and emotional needs.

Effective communication plays a crucial role in shaping patient perceptions. It enables healthcare personnel to explain procedures, clarify treatment plans, and respond to concerns. When communication is clear and respectful, patients are more likely to understand information and develop trust in healthcare providers. As a result, service communication is a key factor influencing patient satisfaction (Arief & Gito, 2021; Jameel et al., 2025).

However, communication alone does not fully explain patient satisfaction. Interpersonal factors, particularly empathy, also shape patient experiences. Empathy refers to the ability to understand patients' feelings, acknowledge their concerns, and respond with

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compassion (American Psychological Association, 2023). It allows healthcare personnel to address emotional needs and create interactions where patients feel respected and valued.

Empathy has been linked to higher patient satisfaction, as patients who feel understood and supported tend to evaluate their experiences more positively. Moreover, recent studies suggest that empathy may mediate the relationship between communication and satisfaction (Arshad et al., 2024; Li et al., 2022). While communication ensures the transfer of essential information, empathy introduces an emotional layer that elevates the service experience, leading patients to view their care as more supportive and truly patient-centered.

Within hospital settings, Customer Relations Offices (CROs) play an important role in facilitating communication between patients and healthcare institutions. These offices handle inquiries, concerns, and complaints, ensuring that patients feel heard and assisted. Because CRO personnel frequently interact with patients, the quality of their communication and their ability to demonstrate empathy significantly influence patients' service quality perceptions, which serve as a critical touchpoint for fostering enduring patient trust and satisfaction throughout their journey.

In the Philippine healthcare landscape, hospitals have prioritized initiatives to enhance communication and patient-centered care (Asis et al., 2025; Panganiban et al., 2024). Despite these efforts, challenges remain, particularly in facilities with high patient demand and limited resources. Patients may still experience delays, unclear explanations, or insufficient emotional support. These concerns highlight the need to strengthen both communication practices and empathy in healthcare service units.

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In Calamba City, Laguna, healthcare institutions serve an expanding population, with Customer Relations Offices (CROs) acting as vital intermediaries between patients and hospital departments. Within these key support units, the effectiveness of staff communication and the degree of empathy demonstrated are crucial in shaping patient experience and satisfaction within a highly competitive and increasingly demanding healthcare environment.

Despite the recognized importance of communication and empathy, limited research has examined their interaction within service-support units such as CROs. Most studies focus on clinical settings involving physicians and nurses. Therefore, there is a need to better understand how communication in administrative units influences patient satisfaction and how empathy mediates this relationship to bridge the gap between administrative processes and the delivery of compassionate, patient-centered care.

This study addresses the existing research gap by examining empathy as a mediator in the relationship between service communication (independent variable) and patient satisfaction (dependent variable). Focusing on Customer Relations Offices within selected healthcare institutions in Calamba City, Laguna, the findings aim to improve communication strategies and strengthen empathetic engagement to ultimately enhance overall service quality.

Research Objectives aim to 1) Determine the level of service communication, 2) Determine the level of empathy, 3) Determine the level of patient satisfaction, 4) Examine the effect of service communication on patient satisfaction, 5) Examine the effect of service communication on empathy, 6) Examine the effect of empathy on patient satisfaction, 7)

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Determine whether empathy mediates the relationship between service communication and patient satisfaction, and 8) Create an action plan.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research locale was Calamba City, Laguna, focusing on selected public and private healthcare institutions. A sample of 150 patients was drawn using purposive and random sampling techniques. Inclusion criteria required respondents to be at least 18 years old, capable of providing informed consent, and to have availed of CRO services within the last 6 to 12 months.

Data were collected via a structured, researcher-made survey questionnaire divided into parts: demographic profile, service communication quality, empathy, and patient satisfaction. Variables were measured using a four-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 - Strongly Disagree to 4 - Strongly Agree). The instrument demonstrated high reliabilities of 0.917 for Service Communication, 0.948 for Empathy, and 0.931 for Patient Satisfaction (Cronbach's alpha > 0.70). Content Validity Index was computed to be 1.00, which is higher than the 0.99 CVI requirement. Data were collected through surveys after securing institutional approval and informed consent. Confidentiality and ethical standards were strictly observed.

Quantitative data were treated using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The following statistical tools were used: Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation to determine the overall levels of service communication, empathy, and patient satisfaction as perceived by the respondents, Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation to examine the strength and direction

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of the relationships among service communication, empathy, and patient satisfaction, Regression Analysis to determine the direct effects of service communication on empathy and patient satisfaction, Sobel Test for Mediation to test whether empathy served as a mediating variable in the relationship between service communication and patient satisfaction.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The majority of respondents were female (54.00%) and aged 56 years and above (24.00%). Most visited private hospitals (83.33%) and transacted with the CRO primarily to request assistance (39.33%) or make inquiries (30.00%).

**Table 1.** *Service Communication Manifestation Level as assessed by Patients in Calamba City Healthcare CROs*

Indicators in terms of Service Communication	$\bar{X}$	VI	Rank
1. The staff clearly explains hospital procedures and policies.	2.63	M	8.5
2. The information provided are complete and accurate.	2.65	M	6.5
3. The staff communicates using language I could easily understand.	3.09	M	1
4. I receive updates or feedback about my concern promptly.	2.51	M	10
5. The staff listens attentively to what I had to say.	2.65	M	6.5
6. The staff maintains a polite and professional tone during our interaction.	3.08	M	2
7. The staff verifies that I understood the information they provided.	2.63	M	8.5
8. Communication reduces my confusion or anxiety.	2.70	M	4
9. The staff ensures confidentiality when discussing my concerns.	2.66	M	5
10. Overall, the communication process is clear, consistent, and	2.71	M	3

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reliable.

<b>GENERAL ASSESSMENT</b>	<b>2.73</b>	<b>M</b>
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>0.749</b>	

Legend:

3.26 – 4.00 Strongly Agree (SA)/ Fully Manifested    2.51 – 3.25 Agree (A)/ Manifested

1.76 – 2.50 Disagree (D)/ Partially Manifested    1.00 – 1.75 Strongly Disagree (SD)/ Not Manifested

The Service Communication in Calamba City Healthcare Customer Relation Offices was **Agree/Manifested** with a general assessment of 2.73 and standard deviation of 0.749, shown in Table 1, as assessed by the patients. This indicates that service communication practices are generally present but not yet fully optimized. Furthermore, the indicator *"The staff communicates using language I could easily understand"* had the highest computed mean of 3.09. Meanwhile, the indicator *"I receive updates or feedback about my concern promptly"* had the lowest computed mean of 2.51. This shows that clarity, professionalism, and consistency are strengths, while responsiveness and confirmation of understanding remain areas for improvement.

**Table 2.** Empathy Level Manifested by Frontline Staff as assessed by Patients in Calamba Healthcare Customer Relations Offices

Indicators in terms of Empathy Level	$\bar{X}$	VI	Rank
1. The staff makes me feel that my concern was important.	2.53	M	8.5
2. The staff shows understanding of my feelings or situation.	2.51	M	10
3. The staff expresses concern and compassion during our interaction.	2.53	M	8.5
4. The staff patiently listens even when I am emotional or frustrated.	2.59	M	5
5. I feel comfortable sharing my concerns with the staff.	2.87	M	2

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6. The staff treats me as a person, not just as a case or number.	2.89	M	1
7. The staff adjusts his/her communication style based on my emotional state.	2.67	M	3
8. The staff apologizes sincerely when a problem occurs.	2.58	M	6
9. I feel that the staff genuinely cares about my well-being.	2.61	M	4
10. Overall, the staff shows empathy and sensitivity to my needs.	2.56	M	7

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**GENERAL ASSESSMENT** **2.63** **M**

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**Standard Deviation** **0.725**

Legend:

3.26 – 4.00 Strongly Agree (SA)/ Fully Manifested 2.51 – 3.25 Agree (A)/ Manifested

1.76 – 2.50 Disagree (D)/ Partially Manifested 1.00 – 1.75 Strongly Disagree (SD)/ Not Manifested

The Empathy Level Manifested by Frontline Staff in Calamba City Healthcare Customer Relations Offices, was **Agree/Manifested** with a general assessment of 2.63 and a standard deviation of 0.725, as shown in Table 2, as assessed by patients. This indicates that empathy is generally present at a moderate level. Furthermore, the indicator "The staff treats me as a person, not just as a case or number" had the highest computed mean of 2.89. Meanwhile, the indicator "The staff shows understanding of my feelings or situation" had the lowest computed mean of 2.51. This shows that personalization and adaptability are more evident than emotional validation and compassionate expression.

**Table 3.** Patient Satisfaction Level as assessed by Patients in Calamba City Healthcare Customer Relations Office

Indicators in terms of Patient Satisfaction Level	$\bar{X}$	VI	Rank
1. I am satisfied with the quality of service -communication I experience.	3.01	S	3.5

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2. The services I receive meet my expectations.	2.94	S	8
3. My concerns are handled effectively and efficiently.	2.95	S	7
4. The staff makes me feel valued as a patient.	2.93	S	9
5. I am satisfied with the responsiveness of the staff.	2.96	S	6
6. I am satisfied with the empathy shown by the staff.	2.92	S	10
7. I will recommend this hospital to family and friends.	3.04	S	1.5
8. I will return to this hospital if I need services again.	3.04	S	1.5
9. My overall experience with the customer relations office is positive.	3.00	S	5
10. Overall, I am highly satisfied with the hospital's services.	3.01	S	3.5

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## GENERAL ASSESSMENT

**2.98 M**

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## Standard Deviation

**0.563**

Legend:

3.26 – 4.00 Strongly Agree (SA)/ Fully Satisfied

2.51 – 3.25 Agree (A)/Satisfied

1.76 – 2.50 Disagree (D)/ Partially Satisfied

1.00 – 1.75 Strongly Disagree (SD)/ Not Satisfied

The Patient Satisfaction Level in Calamba City Healthcare Customer Relations Offices, was **Agree/Satisfied** with a general assessment of 2.98 and standard deviation of 0.563, as shown in Table 3, as assessed by patients. This indicates that patients are generally satisfied with CRO services. Furthermore, the indicators "I will recommend this hospital to family and friends" and "I will return to this hospital if I need services again" had the highest computed mean of 3.04. Meanwhile, the indicator "I am satisfied with the empathy shown by the staff" had the lowest computed mean of 2.92. Although all indicators fall within the satisfied range, relational and emotional aspects were slightly lower than communication and loyalty-related indicators.

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**Table 4.** Regression Analysis on the Impact of Service Communication on Patient Satisfaction in Calamba City Healthcare CROs

Model	B	SE B	$\beta$	t	p	Decision	Remarks
(Constant)	1.26	0.14	-	9.00	.000		
Service Communication Manifestation Level	0.63	0.072	0.561	8.77	.000	Reject Ho	Significant

Dependent Variable: Patient Satisfaction Level

R – Square = .314

Adjusted R Square = .309

F-value = 68.6

Significance = .000

Table 4 presents the results of the simple linear regression examining the effect of Service Communication (SC) on Patient Satisfaction (PS). The probability value of .000 was less than the level of significance at .05, thus rejecting the null hypothesis. The results of the study revealed that Service Communication Manifestation Level significantly impacted Patient Satisfaction Level by 31.4%. It implies that enhancing service communication can lead to measurable improvements in patient satisfaction within Customer Relations Offices.

**Table 5.** Regression Analysis on the Impact of Service Communication on Empathy in Calamba City Healthcare CROs

Model	B	SE B	$\beta$	t	p	Decision	Remarks
(Constant)	0.206	0.107	-	1.935	.055		
Service Communication Manifestation Level	0.888	0.038	0.887	23.346	.000	Reject Ho	Significant

Dependent Variable: Empathy Level

R – Square = .786

Adjusted R Square = .785

F-value = 545.049

Significance = .000

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Table 5 presents the results of the simple linear regression examining whether Service Communication (SC) predicts Empathy (E). The probability value of .000 was less than the level of significance at .05, thus rejecting the null hypothesis. The results of the study revealed that Service Communication Manifestation Level significantly impacted Empathy Level by 78.6%. It implies that strengthening Service Communication through clarity, responsiveness, professional tone, and structured interactions can substantially enhance perceived empathy in Customer Relations Offices.

**Table 6.** Regression Analysis on the Impact of Empathy on Patient Satisfaction in Calamba City Healthcare CROs

Model	B	SE B	$\beta$	t	p	Decision	Remarks
(Constant)	1.530	0.122		12.572	.000		
Empathy Level	0.551	0.045	0.710	12.254	.000	Reject Ho	Significant

Dependent Variable: Patient Satisfaction Level  
R – Square = .504  
Adjusted R Square = .500  
F-value = 150.154  
Significance = .000

Table 6 presents the results of the simple linear regression examining whether Empathy Level predicts Patient Satisfaction Level. The probability value of .000 was less than the level of significance at .05, thus rejecting the null hypothesis. The results of the study revealed that Service Communication Manifestation Level significantly impacted Empathy Level by 50.4%. It implies that strengthening empathic behaviors, such as emotional understanding, validation, and compassionate communication, can meaningfully improve patient satisfaction in Customer Relations Offices.

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**Table 7.** Test of Mediation of Empathy between Service Communication and Patient Satisfaction in Calamba City Healthcare Customer Relation Offices

Regression Path	t value	Sobel Test	p-value	Decisions	Remarks
Service Communication → Empathy	23.346	-	<.001	Reject H <sub>0</sub>	Significant
Empathy → Patient Satisfaction	12.254	-	<.001	Reject H <sub>0</sub>	Significant
Indirect Effect (SC → PS via Empathy)	-	10.85	<.001	Reject H <sub>0</sub>	Significant

Based on the Sobel test of mediation of Empathy on the relationship between service communication and patient satisfaction, with a test statistic of 17.812 and a probability value of .000, which is less than the level of significance at .05, the null hypothesis is rejected. The results revealed that Empathy carried a significant effect to service communication and patient satisfaction. This mediation implies that the total effect of service communication on patient satisfaction is channeled through the staff's ability to demonstrate empathy.

**Table 8.** Proposed Action Plan Matrix for Enhancing Service Communication and Empathy in Calamba City Customer Relations Offices

Key Findings/ Problems Identified	Objectives	Proposed Activities	Responsible Office	
			/ Person, Source of Fund, and Timeline	Success Indicators
Lower ratings in promptness	Improve promptness and timeliness	•Develop standard response time guidelines	•CRO Supervisor / Quality Assurance	•≥ 80% of patient concerns

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updates and responsiveness	•Implement structured Unit	addressed within
feedback of	follow-up system for	standard response
mechanisms of communication	patient concerns	time
	•Monitor compliance	•Weekly
	through weekly reports	compliance reports
		showing $\geq$ 90%
		adherence

Moderate ratings in and explanation of procedures and verification of understanding	Enhance clarity of effectiveness of communication	•Conduct communication skills workshops	•HR Department / External Communication Trainer	• $\geq$ 85% of staff trained
		•Train staff on "teach-back" method	• Training and Development Fund	• $\geq$ 80% of patients report understanding
		•Develop simplified communication scripts	• 6 months	procedures clearly in post-service surveys

Lower scores in emotional validation, compassion, and feeling valued	Strengthen empathy and emotional intelligence	•Conduct empathy and emotional intelligence training	•HR Department / Hospital Administration	• $\geq$ 80% of staff demonstrate improved empathy in performance evaluations
		•Implement role-playing simulations	•Hospital Training Fund	
		•Integrate empathy standards in staff performance evaluation	•6 months (with annual refresher)	• $\geq$ 75% of patients report feeling valued and supported

Empathy mediates the	Institutionalize the empathy-	•Develop Communication and Empathy Service Management	Hospital Management /	•100% of staff follow SOPs
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relationship between service communication and patient satisfaction	centered service culture	Manual •Establish SOPs for handling patient concerns •Conduct supervisory coaching sessions	CRO Head •Hospital Operational Fund •3 months	•≥ 80% of patients rate service as consistently empathic
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Need for continuous monitoring of service quality	Ensure ongoing quality improvement and accountability	•Implement quarterly patient satisfaction surveys •Conduct review meetings to analyze results •Develop corrective action plans	•Quality Assurance Office •Hospital Operational Fund •Quarterly Ongoing	•≥90% survey response rate •≥75% of identified gaps addressed within the next quarter
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An action plan was designed to address the key areas identified in the study. The plan focuses on enhancing the overall performance of Customer Relations Offices (CROs) in healthcare institutions by improving service communication, strengthening empathic engagement, ensuring timely responsiveness, and optimizing patient satisfaction outcomes. To achieve these objectives, it outlines strategic activities targeting both technical and relational aspects of service delivery.

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## Conclusions

Based on the summary of findings derived from the statistical analyses and patient assessments, the following conclusions were formulated.

1. That service communication in Customer Relations Offices (CROs) demonstrates foundational strengths, particularly in the use of clear language, professional tone, and consistent interaction processes, but still requires improvement in responsiveness, timely updates, detailed procedural explanations, and verification of patient understanding to ensure more effective and patient-centered service delivery.
2. That empathy is present in staff–patient interactions, primarily manifested through respectful treatment, personalization, and adaptability to patients’ needs; however, its affective components, such as emotional validation, explicit understanding of patient feelings, and compassionate expression, require further reinforcement to achieve deeper emotional engagement.
3. That patient satisfaction in Calamba City healthcare CROs is high, especially in areas related to communication quality, overall service performance, and loyalty intentions, yet the relational and emotional dimensions of care slightly lag behind, indicating the need for stronger emphasis on patient value and emotional support.
4. That service communication significantly contributes to patient satisfaction, as improvements in clarity, responsiveness, and professional interaction are directly associated with higher satisfaction levels, underscoring its critical role in achieving effective and patient-centered service outcomes.

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5. That service communication is a major driver of empathy, as strong and structured communication practices substantially enhance patients' perceptions of staff empathy, highlighting that empathic engagement is largely operationalized through effective communication behaviors. This indicates that improvements in communication quality are associated with higher levels of satisfaction.
6. That empathy is a strong determinant of patient satisfaction, demonstrating that when patients feel valued, understood, and emotionally supported, their overall evaluation of healthcare services significantly improves, reinforcing the importance of relational competence in service delivery.
7. That empathy serves as a partial mediator between service communication and patient satisfaction, indicating that communication enhances satisfaction both directly and indirectly through empathetic engagement, thereby amplifying its positive effects through relational and emotional pathways. The findings indicate that the total effect of service communication on patient satisfaction is channeled through the staff's ability to demonstrate empathy.
8. That implementing a structured and comprehensive action plan targeting service communication, empathy development, responsiveness, and continuous monitoring can systematically enhance CRO performance and strengthen patient-centered care practices within healthcare institutions.

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## Recommendations

In light of the conclusions drawn from the study, and considering the identified strengths and areas for improvement in service communication, empathy, and patient satisfaction, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the overall performance of Customer Relations Offices (CROs) in Calamba City healthcare institutions. These recommendations aim to strengthen patient-centered service delivery, reinforce relational competence, and ensure continuous quality improvement.

1. Healthcare administrators, CRO supervisors, and quality assurance units may strengthen service communication practices by institutionalizing clear communication protocols, establishing response-time standards, implementing structured follow-up systems, and requiring verification of patient understanding to address gaps in responsiveness and procedural explanation. These improvements will primarily benefit patients, who will experience clearer information, faster responses, and more reliable service interactions.
2. Human Resource departments and hospital management may reinforce affective empathy among frontline CRO staff through structured emotional intelligence training, role-playing simulations, and workshops focused on emotional validation and compassionate expression. These initiatives will benefit patients by ensuring more compassionate interactions and will also support CRO personnel in developing stronger interpersonal and relational skills.
3. Hospital management and CRO personnel may enhance the relational and emotional dimensions of service delivery by developing initiatives that ensure patients consistently feel valued, heard,

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and emotionally supported during their interactions with Customer Relations Office staff. Such initiatives will strengthen patient trust and improve overall service experiences.

4. Training and development units, HR departments, and hospital administrators may implement comprehensive communication improvement programs that include continuous skills training, standardized service scripts, and regular performance assessments to further elevate patient satisfaction outcomes. These initiatives will benefit both CRO staff, by improving professional communication competence, and patients, by ensuring more consistent and effective service delivery.
5. Hospital administrators and CRO leadership may operationalize empathy within communication strategies by embedding relational competence standards into daily service protocols. This will ensure that communication behaviors consistently reflect understanding, personalization, and patient-centered care, thereby improving the experiences of patients and strengthening the overall quality of healthcare service delivery.
6. Supervisors, HR personnel, and training coordinators may establish continuous empathy development mechanisms, such as coaching sessions, peer evaluations, and structured feedback systems, to sustain emotionally responsive and patient-focused behaviors among staff. These efforts will support CRO personnel development while maintaining empathetic service experiences for patients.
7. Healthcare institutions and staff development programs may integrate technical communication skills with relational and emotional strategies in all training initiatives to maximize both the direct

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and indirect effects of service communication on patient satisfaction. This integration will enhance staff competencies while improving patient perceptions of service quality.

8. Hospital management, CRO supervisors, and quality assurance offices may ensure the full implementation and monitoring of the proposed action plan through regular evaluation, supervisory oversight, and systematic patient feedback collection. These monitoring mechanisms will benefit patients, healthcare personnel, and healthcare institutions by ensuring sustained improvements in communication quality, empathic engagement, and overall CRO performance.
9. Future researchers, academic institutions, and healthcare organizations may conduct further studies exploring additional factors influencing patient satisfaction, such as organizational culture, service efficiency, and institutional environment, and to validate the proposed model in other healthcare settings or larger populations. These studies will benefit the academic community and healthcare sector by expanding knowledge on patient-centered service management and improving evidence-based practices.

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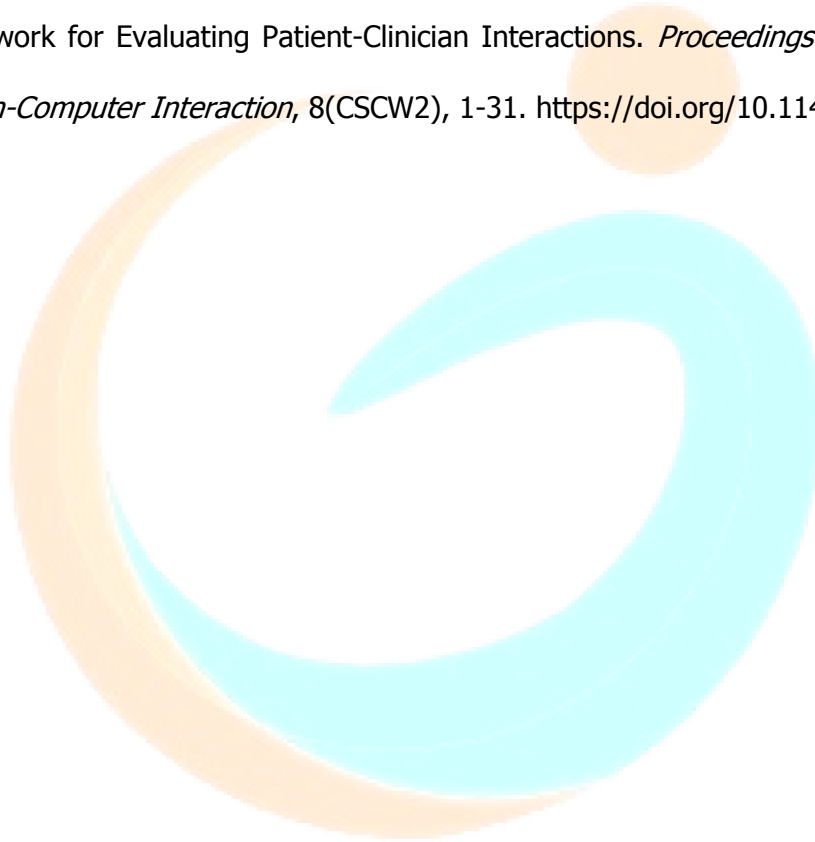
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