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## PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE CORPORATE IMAGE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BENIN TEACHING HOSPITAL (UBTH)

BY

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### Abstract

*People in the medical profession who are generally accused of being apathetic to public opinion now seem to be concerned about public criticisms. The result is that they are now coming to accept public relations as an essential part of health care delivery system. This study is therefore focused on how the public (patients/relations) perceives and rates the corporate image and public relations efforts of the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH). The survey research method was employed in this study and the questionnaire was used as instrument to elicit information from respondents. Data were analyzed by simple percentages. Findings suggest that the corporate image and patients relations are rated very high and public oriented. Based on these findings, the study recommended more enhanced patients friendly measures that will alleviate the suffering of patients.*

### Introduction.

Public Relations generally is the management function, which involves the harmonization of relationships and keeps management alert about public opinion. Soeze (2006) citing the Institute of Public Relations in Britain defined Public Relations as "a deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its publics". In other words, Public Relations is not a 'shot in the dark', a reaction to events, based on hunches, or whims of chances. It is deliberate and planned.

environment, and also communicating effectively with the public.

This is one reason why the role of public relations in any organization is to project and protect the image of the business. As Anderson (1997) cited in Ogbemi (2006, p.3) puts it: "Public Relations is the art of reputation management". It is a communication process, which pervades all aspects of the socio-economic life of society. It is also a means through which individuals; institutions and organizations try to secure mutual understanding, acceptance and goodwill.

Looking specifically at the purpose of public relations, Onabajo (2008) said:

The true purpose of public relations is to create a well-deserved regulation that may involve offering excellent consumer care, showing social responsibility towards the work force, the local community and the

Public relations has assumed an important dimension that even people in the medical profession who are generally accused of being apathetic to public opinion now seem to be concerned about public criticisms. The result is that they are now challenged to accept public relations as an essential part

of health care delivery system. According to Cutlip, Centre and Broom (2005): Hospitals need to carry out planned consistent programmes to break the barriers of public apathy, superstition and the indifference which the public has been exhibiting towards it.

The fact is that hospitals like all non-profit organizations, which they are supposed to be, must approach public relations programming with diverse tactics with the aim of promoting public service and building public trust to get the public support which they need. The laudable objective of public relations notwithstanding, there is still the important problem of implementation. It is in recognition of this fact, that Okon (1998, p. 166) notes that. The problem is that most measures introduced by management to alleviate the suffering of patients are not being appreciated because health workers are often perceived by the public as insensitive coupled with their sporadic strike actions and a cold demand for cash in advance before admitting patients.

The way a patient is treated goes a long way to affect the corporate image of the particular hospital either negatively or positively. Corporate image management is an act of positioning. When positioning, it is imperative to bear in mind: "that the way you present yourself is the way people take you. (Fab-Ukozor 2006, citing Okoro 1998). What this means in essence is that the image an individual, institution or an organization including health institutions create for itself is important in determining the relationship between it and its publics. In the case of a health institution, it is very important that there should be that cordial relationship between it (hospital) and its

patients/relations. The fact is that the way a patient is received and treated on arrival at the hospital influences his or her perception of the service quality and psychologically helps in his or her quick recovery. Against this backdrop, there is a compelling need for increase awareness of public relations as a tool in effective health management practices in Nigeria.

### **Statement Of The Problem**

There is no doubt, that the cost of health care delivery is getting out of the reach of the common man. Recent developments have raised serious concern about the quality and cost of health care and some people are beginning to raise questions about the non-profit status of some hospitals. These general complaints about health delivery services must have informed the decision of the management of the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH) to address some of them. Measures put in place since 2002 include:

- Credit facilities for patients from admission to discharge.
- Renovations of all departments to make them wear a new look.
- Purchase of new ultrasound machines for the Radiology department.
- Establishment of a fertility center (Test-tube babies programme)
- Provision of wireless Internet facilities.
- New code of conduct for doctors, nurse and all other health workers.
- Improvement in the catering services.
- Provision of the necessary drugs at affordable prices in the pharmacy department and so on.

The question however, is whether these new measures and innovations have really created the required impression and impact on the public (patients and relations). Are the patients really getting quality treatment at affordable cost? Are drug provided when required and at affordable prices? Are the doctors, nurses and other health workers really receptive to patient's complaints? These and other questions need answering.

### **Objectives Of The Study**

It is obvious that a well-planned and coordinated public relations programme will surely improve the corporate image of the hospital. The objectives of this study therefore include among other things:

- To determine how effective the public relations programmes of the hospital have been.
- To ascertain how the public (patients/relations) perceive the hospital and the effect on its corporate image.
- To examine whether the public (patients/relations) rate the service of the hospital high.
- To find out if the credit facility policy of the hospital is appreciated by those it is targeted at.
- To establish whether or not the hospital staff help in the promotion of the good image of UBTH.
- To identify the expectations of patients/relations.

### **Public Relations Objectives Of UBTH**

There is no doubt that any hospital that is worth its existence needs a programme of good treatment and adequate care for its patients. There must be a patient friendly policy and environment. The University of Benin Teaching Hospital, which is the focus

of this study, has the following as its public relations objectives:

- To create among staff, an awareness of the organizational goals of the hospital.
- To maintain and increase the reputation of the hospital as a patient centred organization, a centre of research and training of requisite manpower.
- To measure effectively trends, attitudes, needs and the reactions of the general public to the hospital and its services.

The public relations department of the hospital, in addition to these has its own specific objective as to project a positive image for the hospital in order to realize the set objectives of teaching, healing, research and provision of health services to the public. In fulfilment of these, it has maintained good relationship with the print and electronic media, both at national and local levels. It also handles the publication of all hospital newsletters, calendars, dairies e.t.c. (UBTH AT 20). It is therefore obvious that the management of UBTH is aware and conscious of the importance of public relations in health care delivery. This is in consonance with the view of Onah (2001) cited by Ekwelem (2005 pp. 86-87) The essential objective of public relations in any organization is to increase public awareness of the organization, to persuade the public to view the organization positively, to discover and target the relevant audience to change personnel attitude in favour of the organization, to extinguish doubts and create appropriate external and internal environment for an organization.

### **Research Questions**

In addition to seeking general information on corporate image building in the health sector, this study specifically attempts to provide answers to the following research questions.

- Is the current relationship between UBTH and its public cordial?
- Are the patients the main focus of UBTH's public relation's programmes?
- How does the public (patients/relations) rate the corporate image of UBTH?
- What are the areas of priority the public (patients/relations) want the hospital to focus on.
- How does the public (patients/relations) get their information about UBTH?
- How does the public (patients relations) assess the behaviour of staff to patients?

### **Significance Of The Study**

It has been said that efficient public relations practice alone cannot change public opinion about a hospital that lacks care and good treatment of its patients. This is why some well planned and articulated patient relations policies and objectives are required. Good treatment, adequate care of patients, which include fair bills, friendly environment and hospital personnel, neat and healthy environment and other patient friendly polices are necessary. (Achison, 2008). There is need for studies to be carried out on the importance of good corporate image for health institutions. It is on this, and the fact that health is basic to human existence, that this study is based.

As far as this researcher knows, no study has been specifically done as regards this

area on UBTH. The health sector, which is a growing one in this country, will no doubt find this study very useful. It will also be of significance to people wanting to research on this, or similar topics.

### **Theoretical Framework**

One of the theories on which this work is based, is the Perceptual Theory. Perception, simply put, is the process by which people select, organize and interpret information to form a meaningful picture of the world (Ogbemi, 2008). Perception is not reality. The impression people have or form about anything, including an organization is therefore their perception of that thing or organization. To support this, Akpan (2007) citing Akpan (1993) asserts that perception is the way by which people learn about the world and simultaneously mixing and blending them with internal stimuli. According to him, perception therefore involves his own vision of the world and his vision image of world equally influences him. It can be deduced from the above that the way people perceive an organization's image is largely dependent on their vision, which is determined by the impression that has been created by the organization itself.

The Social Relationship theory, which is basically concerned, about the interactions or relationship between members of social categories is also relevant to this study. In such social relationships, according to this theory, interpersonal communication is of paramount importance because during face to face communication, members of a group are able to influence one another and that can help to determined the efforts of mass media effect on people. Fab-Ukozor (2006) citing Schramm (1954) said that: "Mass communication is a collective social process rather than an individual experience

and the mass media use is part of social interaction in a society: The impression of the public about the organization also has a lot to do with the social interaction process, the interpersonal relationship between customers (patients) and the workers in the organization rather than an individual's experience.

The impression of the public about the organization, which is a function of the social interaction process, is what is referred to as corporate image. This brings us to the concept of corporate image. Corporate image can be generally defined as the summation of all those impression and communication. This is in line with Robert's (1990) view that corporate image is the net result of the interaction of experience, impression, belief, feelings and knowledge people have about a company. It enables the prospective customer to consciously or unconsciously see as 'fit' between the self-image of the organization. It is this that in most case makes the customer patronize a store whether or not the price is favourable. Good corporate image is a very precious possession whether it is attached to a product, company or a country. Miciver (1937, p. 193) concluded "what it stands for is something that gives confidence to customers. It may be efficiency, reliability, value for money, good service, honesty, concern for humanity or a combination of all these qualities". These theories and concept are the tripod on which this study is anchored.

### **Methodology**

The survey research method was adopted for the purpose of this study. This is informed by the fact that unlike other methods, survey is probably the method available to a social scientist interested in

collecting original data for the purpose of describing a population too large to observe directly (Babbie, 1975, p. 259). The questionnaire was used as instrument to elicit information from respondents and the simple table construct and percentages were used to analyze the data collected. This was essentially because the study is mainly an analysis of facts and decision already made. All responses given were tallied and the number of frequencies of each choice converted into percentages. The data was then interpreted and deductions and generalization made.

The population of study consists of all the patients and their relations in the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH) and the study period was between June 1<sup>st</sup> 30<sup>th</sup> 2008. The study covered the present 20 departments of the hospital. Using the simple random sampling technique, ten respondents, five male and five female were randomly sampled from each department making a total of 200 respondents. The return rate of questionnaire was 100 percent.

### **Validation Of Research Instrument**

The questionnaire was sent to experts in the Department of Theatre Arts and Mass Communication in their University of Benin to consider the content validity and it was considered appropriate with some adjustments. Also the test, retest method was employed to establish the reliability of the research instrument.

Data Analysis And Discussion Of Findings

Research Question I

Is the current relationship between UBTH and its publics cordial?

Table 1: Relationship Between UBTH And Its Public

VALUE LABEL	FREQUENCY		TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
	MALE	FEMALE		
VERY GOOD	58	40	98	49
GOOD	22	28	50	25
POOR	14	16	30	15
VERY POOR	10	12	22	11
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

From the above table, it can be seen that 98 (58 male and 40 female), that is 49% of the respondents believe that the current relationship between UBTH and its publics is very good. Fifty (22 male and 28 female) which is 25% of the respondents say it is good. Another 30 (14 male and 16 female) which is 15% of the respondents say it is poor, while the remaining 22 (10 male and

12 female) which represents 11% are of the opinion that it is poor.

From the analysis of the data above it can be deduced that majority of the respondents 18 (74%) believe that the relationship between the public and UBTH is cordial and favorable, while only 52 (26%) are of the opinion that it is not favorable.

VALUE LABEL	FREQUENCY		TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
	MALE	FEMALE		
YES	80	78	158	79
NO	23	17	40	20
NO COMMENT	-	2	2	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

Table II shows that an overwhelming majority of 158 (80 male and 78 female) which makes up 78% of the respondents believe that the public relations programmes of the hospital is focused on the patients, while only 40 (23 male and 17 female) which represents 20% of the

respondents said No. However, two respondents which are female representing one percent of the respondents said they had no comment. It can therefore be concluded from the above result, that majority of the respondents believe that the hospitals public relations programmes are focused on patients.

**Research Question III**

How does the public (patients/relations) rate the corporate image of UBTH?

Table iii: Corporate Image Of UBTH

VALUE LABEL	FREQUENCY		TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
	MALE	FEMALE		
VERY GOOD	48	43	91	45.5
GOOD	14	38	52	26
POOR	29	16	45	22.5
VERY POOR	8	4	12	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

From the table above it can be seen that 91 respondents (48 male and 43 female) respondents which is 45.5% rate the corporate image of UBTH as very good, while 52 (14 male and 38 female) that is

26% rate it as good. Those that rate it as poor are 45 (29 male and 16 female), which is 22.5%. The remaining 12 (eight male and four female), which are 6% rate it as very poor.

**Research Question IV**

What are the areas of priority that the public (patients / relations) want the hospital to focus on?

Table IV: Areas Of Priority The Public Want UBTH To Focus On

VALUE LABEL	FREQUENCY		TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
	MALE	FEMALE		
1. Cleanliness	21	14	35	17.5
2. Prompt response to patients call	18	20	38	19
3. Improvement on Admission procedure	22	9	31	15.5
4. Reduction in cost of Drugs	25	12	37	18.5
5. Education of patients	11	18	29	14.5
6. Others	8	22	30	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>



The analysis on Table IV shows that 35 (21 male and 14 female) which is 17.5% of the respondents want the area of cleanliness to be the focus, while 38 (18 male and 20 female) which is 19% want prompt response to patient's call. Those that prefer improvement on admission procedure are 31 (22 male and nine female), which are 15.5%. Thirty-seven (25 male and 12 female) 18.5% prefer reduction in the cost of drugs, while 29 (11 male and 18 female) 14.5% want education of patient's as the area of focus. The remaining 30 (eight male and 22 female) that is 15% will want other areas such as reduction in hospital charges,

introduction of more recreational facilities and so on as the areas of focus.

From the above it can be seen that there is no particular area that a majority of the respondents want the focus to be on.

However, respondents preference is in this order, prompt response to patient's call 19%, Reduction in cost of drugs, 18.5%, cleanliness 17.5%, improvement an admission procedure 15.5%, others 15% and education of patients 14.5%. This shows that there are a lot of areas in which the public feel the hospital should improve on its services.

#### Research Question V

How does the public (patients/relations) get their information about UBTH?

Table V: How The Public Get Their Information About Ubth

VALUE LABEL	FREQUENCY		TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
	MALE	FEMALE		
1. Through the mass media	48	18	66	33
2. Through relations and who have work in the hospital	14	17	31	15.5
3. Through friends and relations who have used the hospital	13	32	45	22.5
4. Through the hospital publication	20	18	38	19
5. Others	14	6	20	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

An analysis of table V reveals that 66 (48 male and 18 female) 33% said that they get their information about the hospital through the mass media like radio, television and newspaper, while 31 (14 male and 17 female) 15.5% said they get theirs through relations and friends who work in the hospital. Another 45 (13 male and 17 female) 22.5% said it is through friends and

relations who have used the hospital, while 38 (20 male and 18 female) 19% said it is got through the hospital publications.

The remaining 20 (14 male and six female) making 10% of the respondents said it is through some others means.

The analysis above shows vividly that majority of the respondents said they get their information about the hospital through

the mass media. This accounts for 66 (33%) of the respondents. Another 38 (19%) said it is through the hospital's publications. The implication is that 52%, that is the total of these two categories get their information from one form of publication or the other, either internally or externally. This to a

large extent, shows that the public relations department is making a lot of efforts as educate the public. Although, it is unethical medically to advertise, some public relations efforts could be made to educate the public about the operations of any health institution.

**Research Question VI**

**How does the public (patients / relations) assess the behaviour of staff to patients?  
Table VI Assessment Of Staff Behaviour Towards Patients**

VALUE	FREQUENCY		TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
	MALE	FEMALE		
YES	59	37	96	48
NO	31	60	91	45.5%
NO COMMENT	4	9	13	6.5
	<b>94</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

The analysis above in Table VI shows that 96 (59 male and 37 female) which is 48% of the respondents believe that the staff behave well, while 91 (31 male and 60 female) 45.5% said that the staff do not behave well towards patients. The remaining 13 (four male and nine female) 6.5% said they had no comment.

From the data above one can say that the staff of UBTH are well behaved, because a majority 48% percent, of the respondents said the staff are well behaved. This is against the 45.5%, who are of the opinion that the staff are not well behaved. A critical analysis of the findings here will make one to conclude that the hospital has to do more in the area of educating the staff on human relations which is an essential ingredient in hospital administration. Another look at

Table IV shows that prompt response to patients call is an area where most of the respondents, 19% want the hospital to focus. The table in question also shows that a lot of respondents, 15.5% want an improvement in the area of admission procedure. These findings agree to some extent with the fact that the hospital has to improve in the area of human relations.

**Conclusion**

From the findings of this study, it could be safely concluded that the corporate image of the university of

Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH) is favourable and rated high by the public. This is supported by findings as shown in Table III. Majority of the respondents, 71.5% said it is very good and good, which

is positive, as against 28.5% which say it is poor and very poor, which is negative. This is further buttressed by the responses on Table I where, an overwhelming majority 74% said that the current relationship between the hospital and the public is cordial (very good and good), while only 26% said it is not (poor and very poor).

The findings have shown that the efforts of the present management as enumerated in the introduction to this study are yielding a lot of fruits. However, a lot of efforts still have to be put in the area of the relationship of staff with patients. A look at Table V also shows other areas where respondents want the hospital's management to focus. Conclusively, it could be deduced that the corporate image of UBTH is favourable.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are hereby made

- The hospital should embark on re-orientation programmes for all categories of her staff to educate them on the fundamentals of public relations, with emphasis on good human relations. Health workers must be made to realize that patients come to the hospital under one sort of stress or the other and they (health workers) have to do a lot to make them feel relaxed.
- The ever rising cost of hospital drugs and bill can be explained through education of the patients and their relations. Hand bills can be distributed to patients and visitors, brochures placed in check-in desks and hospital drawers coupled with wide spread publicity in the media. (Okon 1998)
- The Public Relations department of hospitals should improve on their press relations and make use of the media more in publicizing break through in medical research and efforts made to improve the services in the hospital. According to Okon (1998 pp. 168 169) in a distilled sense, hospital public relations should center on the following.
- Entrenching prompt and efficient admission procedures.
- Dropping the requirements for advance payment
- Educating health workers on friendly and courteous manners.
- Ensuring that hospital surroundings are clean, tidy and pleasing to the eyes.
- Ensuring also a two-way communication between the hospital and the press since a hostile reporter can seriously damage the reputation of a hospital publishing a story on how a careless mistake by a doctor led to a patient's death.

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