

Emotional Intelligence in Healthcare

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Abstract: Emotional intelligence (EI) can be described as the ability to adaptively perceive, understand, regulate, and harness emotions in self and others. It is an emerging concept that has become a part of the fabric of the healthcare delivery. Healthcare is a sector that is dominated by relationship oriented care. Healthcare professionals with high EI are more compassionate, empathic, resilient, caring, and able to manage emotions in others. The purpose of this paper is to present areas of application of emotional intelligence in healthcare.

Keywords: Emotion, Emotional Intelligence, Healthcare

I. INTRODUCTION

All humans have two minds: the rational one and the emotional one. The two work together in harmony to assist in making decisions. Emotions serve as internal monitors to critically gauge situations when making decisions. They include hatred, guilt, shame, pride, admiration, liking, regret, rejoicing, disappointment, and delight. Although everyone expresses emotions, people differ in how they deal with intrapersonal or interpersonal emotional information. Across academic disciplines, the impact of emotion can be noticed on individuals and their environments.

Today, healthcare institutions are focusing more on business-related issues such as occupancy rate, staff productivity, cost containment, federal regulations, insurance, and increased competition [1]. Emotional intelligence (EI) can address some of these issues.

It is a valuable asset for healthcare professionals, who work in a very stressful environment (such as hospitals, clinics, and medical offices), which could negatively affect their personal health, actions, and performance.

II. CONCEPT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence has many forms including verbal intelligence, spatial intelligence, social intelligence, spiritual intelligence, computational intelligence, machine intelligence, artificial intelligence, swarm intelligence, business intelligence, augmented intelligence and emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is as a set of skills that contribute to the accurate expression emotion in oneself and others. It is concerned with understanding oneself and others and coping with the immediate surroundings to be more successful in dealing with environmental demands. It enables individuals to use the information about their feelings and emotions and those of others to guide their thinking and actions [2]. Individuals with high emotionally intelligent can recognize, understand, and manage their own feelings and the feelings of others in positive ways.

Today's technological and globalized economy has increased the demand for emotionally intelligent workers. In healthcare, emotional intelligence can help professions and organizations deliver better deliver care. Emotion is central to the fabric of health care delivery. Emotions influence professional relationships, impact patient care delivery, and affect

healthcare professionals [3]. Figure 1 shows the pyramid of emotional intelligence [4].

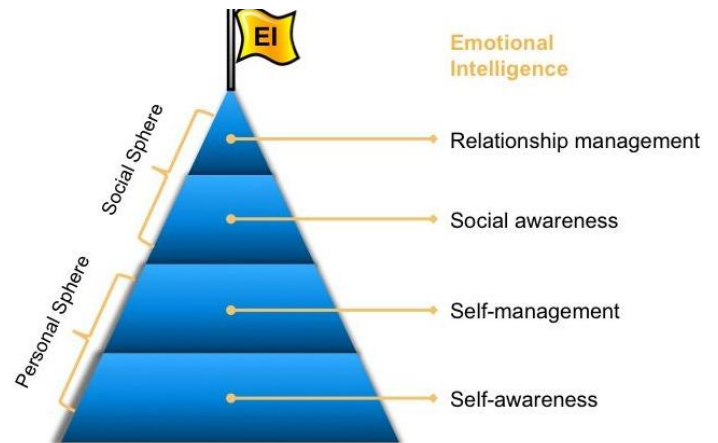


Figure 1: Pyramid of emotional intelligence [4].

Emotional intelligence (EI) is currently a hot topic in the business community. The measure of it is called Emotional Intelligence Quotient or EQ. EI fits well into healthcare profession that articulates caring as a core concept. Emotional intelligence concept has developed along two paths: the ability and mixed models. Ability models conceptualize EI as a standard or abilities that can be assessed with performance tests. Mixed models are the mixture of three constructs: personality traits, personal competencies, and perceived emotional ability [5].

Well-developed emotional intelligence skills are important in the healthcare sector. Research studies have shown that EI education in the healthcare leads to improved patient-doctor relationships, enhanced performance, increased job satisfaction, and increased levels of care. Higher EI in individuals has been linked to various factors such as self-compassion, empathy, resilience, job satisfaction, productivity, caring, and success. On the other hand, low EI in individuals is linked to greater burnout, stress, frustration, and failure.

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence (EI) can be regarded as a critical set of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills in the areas of self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, social awareness, and social skills. These five elements that characterize emotional intelligence were suggested by Daniel Goleman, an American psychologist who helped to popularize emotional intelligence [6].

1. *Self-Awareness:* This is the ability to know your emotions, strengths, weaknesses, drives, and goals. This is the foundation upon what most other EI elements are built. Emotional self-awareness is the ability to recognize one's feelings as well as the ability to differentiate between those emotions, to know what one is feeling and why, and to know what caused the feelings.

2. **Self-Regulation:** This is the ability to stay calm when emotions are running high. Self-regulated individuals have the ability to control their emotions and not let the emotions control them. Working in healthcare can be very emotional and it is imperative that caregivers use techniques to control impulsive feelings and behaviors, communicate effectively and manage their emotions in healthy ways. Impulse control deals with the capacity for accepting impulses, remaining composed, and controlling irresponsible behavior.
3. **Motivation:** This constitutes emotional factors that help one reach their goals. Key competencies are achievement drive, commitment, taking initiative, and being optimistic. Individuals with this element are highly motivated. They keep improving themselves.
4. **Empathy:** Empathy (understanding others; listening well and reading nonverbal cues) is an important aspect in the doctor–patient relationship. It is the ability to understand others’ situation and have compassion on them. It is an important skill every healthcare professional should possess. The concept of empathy is first learned in the family, from parents and family environment [7]. The fact that healthcare is built on empathy has long been recognized.
5. **Social Skills:** These diverse skills are used to induce desirable responses in others. Key competencies are influence, intrapersonal and interpersonal communication skills, ability to manage conflict, being a leader, influencing change, cooperation with others, and team work capabilities. Helping others to develop and grow is viewed as more important than focusing on one’s own successes.

These five elements are illustrated in Figure 2 [8]. Individuals who exhibit high EI usually possess these five key elements.



Figure 2: Five elements of emotional intelligence [8].

IV. APPLICATIONS IN HEALTHCARE

Applying EI concepts in healthcare will improve the interpersonal skills between healthcare professionals and patients. Healthcare leaders must have a solid understanding of how their emotions and actions affect the people around them. The following examples have direct applicability to healthcare.

Healthcare Leadership: This is essential because these leaders serve at the intersection of care giving and business realities. Leadership is basically regarded as a people-oriented

competency that requires certain types of behavior and skills. EI can be applied to healthcare administration and leadership. In fact is regarded as an executive leadership skill that benefits healthcare leaders and organizations. Healthcare leaders include executive leaders, directors, clinical staff, support staff, supervisors, case managers, chaplains, psychologists, and psychiatrists. They play an important role in adopting creativity and innovation in a healthcare care organizations. Physicians are the only caregivers that write orders, perform surgery, interpret diagnostic tests, and write prescriptions. Characteristics of effective healthcare leaders such as self-knowledge, intrapersonal and interpersonal communication, relationship building, resilience, professionalism, optimism and vision are integral to the concept of emotional intelligence. Successful healthcare leaders are those who lead with heart and possess the soft skills needed to positively influence others. Different ways to help leaders enhance their EI include keeping an emotional journal, daily meditation, positive visualization, appreciative inquiry, thought before action, and empathetic listening [9]. An effective leader must be capable of managing conflict well. They move and motivate others through their use of emotions. They ignite their passion and inspire the best in them.

Healthcare Workers: In healthcare, emotional intelligence arises in relationships between healthcare workers and patient. Emotional intelligence is valuable for healthcare professionals because it can increase conscientiousness when performing their duty. When employees realize that emotional intelligence benefits them, their commitment is increased. Emotionally intelligent workers can control their own emotions, and this affects their attitudes to patients [10]. Having high emotional intelligence allows physicians and nurses to be more aware of their own emotions and therefore better able to manage them in stressful situations. The role of the healthcare provider requires a great deal of emotional involvement with patients. For example, chaplains must then identify their emotions before they can identify and address the emotions of others. Physicians are intelligent, hardworking, and high achieving individuals. They have started to learn the importance of emotional intelligence for effective patient relationships. At a time of high competition for patient loyalty, the physicians with high EI are more successful in treating their patients than their less perceptive counterparts. Nurses are caregivers confronted with challenging situations in the work environment. The intelligent use of emotions can enable nurses to remain under control during stressful situations [11].

Healthcare Students: When entering healthcare programs many students are not prepared for the challenges this level of responsibility brings and their success can be dependent on their ability to cope. They are exposed to a lot of stress. They soon come to realize that they are responsible for the lives and well-being of patients and that mistakes can be critical. Students should learn “soft skills” while in school or training. These soft skills include interpersonal communication, integrity, self-control, dependability, conflict resolution, and empathy. These skills lie at the heart of EI. Students in healthcare programs at all levels are faced with many stressors. The nature of healthcare education requires students to possess higher EI, stress coping strategies, and critical thinking skills [12].

Caring Outcomes: Patient outcomes can be improved if healthcare workers show care, compassion, and empathy towards their patients. When healthcare givers

change the way they interact with other patients, it can result in a changed outcome.

Stress Management: This is the ability to weather difficult situations without becoming overwhelmed. Stress is increasing in daily living. Consequently, there is an increase in disruptive behavior and violence in the workplace, including healthcare. Working in healthcare can bring a lot occupational stress and burnout to physicians and nurses due to the emotionally challenging and physically demanding nature of their job [13]. The stress management realm deals an individual's stress tolerance and the ability to control emotions. EI and stress coping strategies have been correlated in studies on various healthcare students and professionals. Unmanaged stress can lead to impulsive and explosive behavior.

Emotional intelligence can also be applied to other healthcare-related areas such as medical laboratory, job satisfaction, workplace, patient-family centered care, and delegating,

V. BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

Studies have shown that EI education in the healthcare sector benefits communication skills and leads to improved patient-doctor relationships. Emotional intelligence can bring many benefits to an individual as well as an entire organization. It has been observed that emotional intelligence increases with age, and that females (especially in nursing) exhibit higher levels of emotional intelligence than their male counterparts. Nurses tend to have a higher level of EI than non-nursing students. Being able to manage one's emotions is beneficial for healthcare professionals, who work under stressful conditions. [14]. Other benefits of high emotional intelligence in healthcare include improved communication and teamwork, ability to respond well under pressure, better quality of care, and greater career satisfaction.

Evidence suggests that there was no direct relationship between physician EI and patient satisfaction with care. Some physicians may consider being too in touch with patients' emotions as distracting from their care giving. Emotional intelligence has been criticized for being poorly defined, not measurable, and overblown in terms of importance and relevance. Scholars are not sure whether emotional intelligence is separate from or part of general intelligence.

CONCLUSION

Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand and manage emotions in self and others. EI concepts are fundamental to healthcare. They are increasing regarded as having an impact on medicine, nursing, and other healthcare disciplines. Research studies demonstrate that EI is the major factor which marks out individuals as effective leaders and innovators. Emotional intelligence can address some of the challenges contemporary healthcare is facing [15]. More information on emotional intelligence in healthcare can be found in the book in [16].

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