

Research on Integrity Culture Construction in Public Hospitals from the Perspective of Medical Corruption Causes

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Abstract: By defining the concepts of medical corruption, public hospitals, and integrity culture within these hospitals, this paper explores the causes of medical corruption. It proposes strategies such as improving power supervision and balancing, enhancing professional ethics and integrity education, fostering a culture of transparency, refining medical service processes and management systems, and promoting healthy doctor-patient relationships. These strategies aim to effectively prevent medical corruption while improving hospital management and service quality, thereby enhancing the hospital's credibility and social influence. Integrity culture is a crucial part of hospital culture construction. Exploring effective paths for building this culture helps create a clean medical environment and supports the comprehensive fight against corruption and the smooth implementation of healthcare reforms in China. The elaboration and explanation of this paper provides insights and inspiration for the current integrity culture construction in public hospitals.

Keywords: Medical Corruption; Public Hospitals; Integrity Culture; Construction Research

1. Introduction

In September 2023, the national government issued an anti-corruption work plan, advocating a zero-tolerance approach to corruption and emphasizing a deepened strategy of comprehensive governance. The plan aims to simultaneously advance efforts to deter corruption, prevent it, and eliminate the desire for it. The healthcare sector is a vital pillar for national prosperity, revitalization, and is a key concern for the well-being of the

people. However, recent years have seen a rise in job-related crimes among hospital staff, severely disrupting market and healthcare management orders, negatively affecting doctor-patient relationships, and worsening the public's "difficulty and expense in seeking medical treatment". These issues violate the public welfare nature of hospitals and hinder healthcare reforms, as well as the implementation of the Healthy China strategy. Therefore, it is crucial to address them [1]. As public hospitals are essential institutions for safeguarding public health, constructing an integrity culture within them has both urgent practical importance and theoretical significance. By examining the causes of medical corruption and exploring paths for building hospital integrity culture, this research not only supports hospital management and service quality improvements but also provides valuable experiences for promoting integrity culture in society as a whole.

2. Concepts and Theoretical Foundation

2.1 Medical Corruption

Medical corruption refers to unethical and illegal behaviors within the healthcare industry driven by personal gain and abuse of power. This includes direct financial transactions like kickbacks and bribery, as well as other forms such as abuse of authority, information leaks, and improper allocation of medical resources. Such corruption harms public interests and ultimately burdens patients and society, reducing overall social welfare [2]. The presence of medical corruption severely impacts the quality of healthcare services and public health safety, damaging the credibility of the healthcare sector and society's overall interests.

2.2 Public Hospitals

"Public" refers to institutions that are government-funded, as opposed to "private" entities. Public hospitals are established or supported by the state or government, with their operations primarily funded through public finance and taxpayer money. Their core characteristics are "public welfare" and "non-profit", meaning their main goal is to provide essential healthcare services and protect people's health rights, rather than seeking profit. Public hospitals play a central role in China's healthcare system, addressing basic medical needs and easing the difficulty of accessing medical care. Given their nature, medical corruption undermines public interests and contradicts the fundamental purpose of public hospitals [3].

2.3 Integrity Culture in Public Hospitals

Integrity culture in public hospitals covers creating a social environment that promotes ethical behavior and reduces and puts an end to corruption through system construction, education and training, as well as supervision and management. It centers on self-discipline and includes both external promotion, like slogans and regulations, and internal aspects such as staff ethics, professional conduct, and the healthcare system's operational mechanisms.

Building integrity culture is a long and complex process requiring attention from leaders at all levels and participation from all staff. Through continuous efforts, the goal is to create a healthy, harmonious, and transparent work environment that effectively prevents and reduces corruption, improves service quality and efficiency, and ultimately achieves sustainable development for hospitals [4].

3. Causes of Corruption in Public Hospitals

3.1 Concentrated Power and Lack of Oversight

In public hospitals, as they gain more autonomy, key decisions such as drug purchases, equipment procurement, and treatment options are increasingly controlled by a few doctors and managers. This concentration of power is common and increases the risk of abuse while weakening the effectiveness of checks and balances [5]. When power is concentrated in key roles, there

is often little oversight, making corruption more likely. For example, in drug and medical device procurement, suppliers may bribe decision-makers to gain unfair advantages. The lack of transparency and the flexibility in how medical resources are allocated also provide opportunities for power abuse. Many hospitals have ineffective supervision systems that fail to detect or stop power misuse because the systems themselves are not well-designed. As a result, corruption can go unnoticed for a long time, and it becomes difficult for outsiders to discover and correct these problems. To reduce corruption, it is crucial to address the problems of concentrated power and lack of oversight in building the integrity culture. This requires building robust supervision systems and creating clear, transparent procedures within public hospitals to minimize the opportunities for corruption.

3.2 Economic Incentives and Ethical Lapses

In 1985, the Chinese government introduced policies such as the *Report on Several Policy Issues Concerning Health Work Reform and On Several Policy Boundaries to be Clarified in Health Reform*. These aimed to reform the healthcare system by adopting a model similar to that of state-owned enterprises. The focus was on granting hospitals more autonomy, allowing them to expand services and increase revenue, thereby setting a market-oriented reform tone for the healthcare system [6].

This marketization greatly encouraged hospitals to generate income, addressing deficits from the planned economy era and improving the efficiency of medical staff. However, it also affected the public welfare role of hospitals and led to significant corruption issues in the medical field. In a market economy, economic incentives became a key driver for healthcare providers' actions. Some medical professionals, lured by profits, deviated from professional ethics, using illegal means to gain financial benefits. For instance, doctors might accept kickbacks from pharmaceutical companies, overprescribe medications or recommend unnecessary treatment to increase their personal income. These actions not only violate professional ethics but also harm patients' health. Hospital management might overlook or even tolerate such behaviors to enhance economic performance, fostering a negative culture. The

complex relationships between medical staff and pharmaceutical companies make corruption more hidden and systemic. To build a culture of integrity, it's essential to educate medical professionals on ethics and establish fair compensation and incentive systems. This ensures medical staff to receive fair financial compensation within a legal and compliant framework, thereby reducing the occurrence of corrupt practices.

3.3 Influence of Industry Culture and Social Environment

Industry culture and social environment significantly influence medical corruption. Within the medical sector, unhealthy practices like excessive power worship, the pursuit of financial gain, and reliance on social connections can encourage corrupt behavior. In some regions, exchanging power and money becomes an "unwritten rule", accepted and widespread, eroding professional ethics and industry credibility. Additionally, societal tolerance of corruption, imbalances in medical resource supply and demand, and the mismatch between public expectations and actual service experiences create external conditions that enable corruption. These issues are challenges in today's social development. To effectively combat corruption, building a culture of integrity requires broad participation and support from all parts of society, not just within hospitals. Strengthening social oversight and raising public awareness of anti-corruption efforts are crucial for fundamentally improving the situation in the medical industry.

4. Analysis of the Current State of Integrity Culture in Public Hospitals

Currently, while some public hospitals in China are beginning to focus on building a culture of integrity, there are still significant shortcomings [7]. Many efforts are superficial, lacking in-depth strategies and effective evaluation mechanisms. Most activities related to integrity culture focus on promotion and training, but lack systematic planning and implementation, resulting in limited effect. Within hospitals, understanding of integrity culture is often vague, and some medical staff do not fully recognize its importance, "prioritizing business over integrity". In this context, there is an urgent need to deepen and

improve the construction of integrity culture. Medical staff need to enhance their awareness of self-discipline and professional ethics. Current educational efforts are not sufficiently deep, and many hospitals lack innovation in promoting integrity culture. The traditional preaching approach fails to resonate with staff, leading to ineffective dissemination. Training content and methods are often monotonous, failing to engage staff or foster participation, which affects their acceptance and practice of integrity culture. Additionally, some hospitals still exhibit formalism, lacking comprehensive oversight and accountability mechanisms. Without effective supervision, integrity efforts may yield little real impact and could even allow negative practices to spread. Therefore, it is crucial to strengthen monitoring and assessment of implementation to ensure that measures are effectively applied in building a culture of integrity in public hospitals.

5. Strategies for Building Integrity Culture in Public Hospitals

5.1 Improving Power Supervision and Balance Mechanisms

To prevent medical corruption, public hospitals should enhance supervision and balance mechanisms. Key steps include: Establishing an Internal Supervision System: Hospitals should clearly define the responsibilities and authority of each department and position to ensure transparency in power execution. Implementing Regular Job Rotation and Cross-Auditing: Hospitals can reduce corruption risks by preventing power from becoming too concentrated through these practices. Using Information Technology: Hospitals should introduce tools like electronic medical records and online approval systems to increase management transparency and enable comprehensive oversight of medical staff activities. Creating Strict Accountability Mechanisms: Hospitals must enforce severe penalties for corrupt behavior to deter misconduct. Clear disciplinary measures should ensure timely accountability and punishment when corruption is detected. Encouraging Internal Reporting: Hospitals should protect whistleblowers' rights to foster a positive supervisory environment [8].

5.2 Strengthening Medical Staff's

Professional Ethics and Integrity Education

The professional ethics and integrity awareness of medical staff are central to building a culture of integrity [9]. Hospitals should enhance self-discipline among medical staff through continuous ethics and integrity education. Regular training sessions, incorporating real-life cases, can help staff understand the importance of ethical and honest behavior. Using methods like scenario simulations and role-playing can improve the effectiveness of this education, helping staff stay clear-headed when facing temptations.

Additionally, hospitals should establish integrity pledges, encouraging staff to commit to ethical practices in their work. Hospitals can also create integrity culture bulletin boards and regularly host related events to boost staff engagement and sense of belonging. Through comprehensive and multi-level integrity education, medical staff can be encouraged to resist corrupt practices in their daily work, thereby enhancing their professional ethics.

5.3 Fostering a Culture of Integrity in Hospitals

Building a culture of integrity requires joint efforts across the hospital to create an atmosphere of honesty. Hospital leaders should set an example by practicing integrity themselves. By developing and implementing integrity plans, hospitals can clarify the responsibilities of leaders and departments, ensuring that integrity efforts align with daily management and the hospital's development goals. Hospitals should also strengthen communication with the community, welcoming public oversight to establish a mechanism of internal and external supervision [10]. Increasing transparency and openness allows the public to understand the hospital's management and services, enhancing its sense of social responsibility. Regular integrity culture activities should be conducted hospital-wide to promote respect for integrity and honesty, embedding these values deeply in the hospital community.

5.4 Improving Medical Service Processes and Management Systems

To prevent corruption from a systemic perspective, it is essential to optimize and improve medical service processes and management systems. Special focus should be

placed on strict management of key areas and high-risk sectors, such as ensuring strict oversight in drug procurement, thorough reviews during equipment acquisition, and rigorous monitoring of financial management. This ensures that all operations are conducted in an open, fair, and transparent manner.

In drug procurement, hospitals can implement a bidding system to ensure fairness and transparency in the process. Additionally, establishing a third-party audit mechanism to oversee financial status, resource procurement, and service quality will help identify and correct issues in a timely manner. These measures can not only enhance hospital management but also reduce corruption, providing a solid institutional foundation for building a culture of integrity.

5.5 Promoting the Healthy Development of Doctor-Patient Relationships

A healthy doctor-patient relationship is essential for fostering a culture of integrity in hospitals. Building harmonious doctor-patient relations not only helps reduce opportunities for corruption but also improves patient satisfaction. To achieve this, hospitals must actively establish clear and effective communication channels between healthcare professionals and patients, which will promote mutual understanding and trust. Regular patient satisfaction surveys can be conducted to gather feedback and better understand patient needs, allowing hospitals to promptly adjust and enhance the quality of their medical services.

Furthermore, hospitals should implement a structured complaint and feedback system to ensure that patient concerns are addressed quickly and effectively. By fostering a culture of respect for patient voices and valuing their feedback, hospitals can facilitate positive interactions between medical staff and patients. This approach not only strengthens doctor-patient relations but also contributes to creating a supportive external environment for the hospital's culture of integrity.

6. Conclusion

In 2022, the Chinese government declared a "zero-tolerance approach to combating corruption and wrongdoing" and emphasized the need to "resolutely address misconduct and corruption issues that affect the public". The

year 2024 marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and is a critical year for implementing the 14th Five-Year Plan. The healthcare sector, which directly impacts the health rights and interests of the people, plays a central role in maintaining public well-being. Addressing corruption in this sector is essential for advancing the Healthy China Strategy, cleaning up the pharmaceutical industry's ecosystem, and protecting the public's legitimate interests. The frequent occurrence of corruption cases in healthcare not only undermines industry ethics and the public nature of hospitals but also increases the burden on patients, eroding their sense of well-being, happiness, and security. Against the backdrop of fully advancing the Healthy China Strategy, this paper examines the causes of corruption in healthcare and proposes strategies for building a culture of integrity in public hospitals. The aim is to offer insights that can help public hospitals explore effective ways to foster a culture of integrity and achieve high-quality development.

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