

LETTER TO EDITOR

The Importance of Nongovernmental Organizations in Patient and Community Education

Parvin Ebrahimi¹, PhD; Mohanna Rajabi², PhD; Aidin Aryankhesal¹, PhD

¹Department of Health Care Services Management, School of Health Management and Information Sciences, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran;

²Department of Health Education and Promotion, School of Health, Arak University of Medical Sciences, Arak, Iran

Corresponding Author:

Mohanna Rajabi, PhD; Department of Health Education and Promotion, School of Health, Arak University of Medical Sciences, Postal code: 38181-46851, Arak, Iran

Tel: +98 86 33662024; Fax: + 98 86 33686443; Email: ma.rajabi@arakmu.ac.ir

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DEAR EDITOR

In recent years, the complexity and diversity of health-related factors, changing disease patterns in communities, the impact of socio-economic factors on health, and the multifaceted challenges of health systems have increased the participation of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in health activities and programs. Driven by a sense of responsibility, NGOs, as voluntary, independent, non-governmental, non-profit, and non-political institutions, perform various activities to solve problems and improve societies.¹

The involvement of NGOs in patient education and health literacy, an area often neglected in the health systems, has yet to be utilized despite the wide range of activities of these organizations in the health sector. Despite the rapid advancements in medical science and technology, health systems still need to improve in educating patients and the community.^{2,3} NGOs can close this gap by using their resources and capacities to educate diverse groups understandably.

According to the health status, demographic characteristics, education, and socio-economic conditions of the target group, NGOs tailor complex medical and health information to be understandable for different people. They help patients understand their health conditions, available treatments, side effects, preventive measures, and diagnostic and therapeutic processes.⁴ Introducing patients to relevant organizations such as care centers, drug supply centers, and diagnostic and treatment clinics is another educational activity of NGOs; consequently, the educational activities of NGOs enhance the patients' informed and active participation in health-related decision-making and lead to better treatment adherence, reduce hospital readmissions, and improved quality of life for many patients.⁴

Through information exchange and educational courses, NGOs empower communities and patients. Compared to the government, NGOs have greater capacity to collect health information from the community, are more familiar with community issues, and enjoy higher trust and acceptance from the public, making their recommendations more readily accepted and implemented. By exchanging information with patients and the community, NGOs raise awareness about significant health issues, encourage the use of health and medical services, and

play an influential role in increasing community awareness by understanding the health needs of various groups.⁵

NGOs can also record and collect data on needy patients, health and treatment priorities of different groups, and information from the implementation of health programs in the community, providing this data to the governmental health sector. NGOs play a significant role in patient and community education through seminars, educational courses for the public and patients, and the publication and distribution of health and medical brochures, newsletters, and pamphlets.⁶ With their grassroots approach, NGOs can uniquely design educational programs tailored to the specific needs of different demographic groups. In sensitive health issues, NGOs can be prominent in providing educational services and increasing the target group's knowledge. Through patient-centered, community-centered, and family-centered education, utilizing city-wide advertising spaces, mass media (television and radio), and social media, NGOs can raise public awareness and provide specialized information about diseases or health problems.

As we face new health challenges, the role of NGOs in patient education will undoubtedly become more critical; therefore, it is essential to recognize and support the activities and roles of NGOs in patient education. Besides patient education, NGOs promote health literacy, health awareness, and active health. Collaboration between NGOs, medical professionals, and experts is a crucial component of the educational activities of NGOs, as it guarantees that the patients receive accurate, up-to-date, and current information that aligns with contemporary medical and treatment practices. Maintaining trust in the materials prepared for the patient education also depends on this cooperation.

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PE, MR and AA conceptualization and design the study. MR drafted the manuscript. All authors reviewed the final manuscript.

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