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INTERNAL CORPORATE COMMUNICATION AS A PILLAR OF HOSPITAL GOVERNANCE: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF BEST PRACTICES

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Abstract

This study investigates internal communication as a strategic pillar of hospital governance to enhance transparency, accountability, service quality, and patient safety. Using a PRISMA-guided systematic review, literature published between 2013 and 2023 was retrieved from Scopus, PubMed, ProQuest, and the Garuda Indonesia database. Out of 1,120 initial records, 5 studies met the inclusion criteria and were analyzed thematically. Findings reveal four key themes of best practice: information transparency and open leadership, two-way feedback and employee participation, digital technology utilization, and organizational culture that promotes psychological safety. These practices strengthen staff trust, improve incident reporting, reduce medical errors, and enhance emergency coordination through structured communication. The results demonstrate that internal communication is not merely an information channel but a critical mechanism for quality governance. This study provides theoretical insights and practical recommendations for hospitals particularly in Southeast Asia to integrate open, technology-driven communication as part of effective and sustainable governance policies.

Keywords: internal communication, hospital governance, patient safety, PRISMA systematic review

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji komunikasi internal sebagai pilar strategis tata kelola rumah sakit untuk meningkatkan transparansi, akuntabilitas, kualitas layanan, dan keselamatan pasien. Dengan menggunakan tinjauan sistematis yang dipandu oleh pedoman PRISMA, literatur yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2013 dan 2023 dikumpulkan dari Scopus, PubMed, ProQuest, dan basis data Garuda Indonesia. Dari 1.120 catatan awal, 5 studi memenuhi kriteria inklusi dan dianalisis secara tematis. Temuan mengungkapkan empat tema utama praktik terbaik: transparansi informasi dan kepemimpinan terbuka, umpan balik dua arah dan partisipasi karyawan, pemanfaatan teknologi digital, serta budaya organisasi yang mempromosikan keamanan psikologis. Praktik-praktik ini memperkuat kepercayaan staf, meningkatkan pelaporan insiden, mengurangi kesalahan medis, dan meningkatkan koordinasi darurat melalui komunikasi terstruktur. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi internal bukan sekadar saluran informasi, melainkan mekanisme kritis bagi tata kelola yang berkualitas. Studi ini memberikan wawasan teoretis dan rekomendasi praktis bagi rumah sakit, khususnya di Asia Tenggara, untuk

mengintegrasikan komunikasi yang terbuka dan didorong oleh teknologi sebagai bagian dari kebijakan tata kelola yang efektif dan berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: komunikasi internal, tata kelola rumah sakit, keselamatan pasien, tinjauan sistematis PRISMA

INTRODUCTION

Hospital governance encompasses the mechanisms, structures, and processes that ensure that hospital organizations are able to provide safe, effective, and accountable services to patients and other stakeholders. One of the key aspects of modern hospitals is patient safety, with organizations such as the WHO stating that medical errors and preventable incidents remain a major global problem. For example, the WHO states in its reports that poor healthcare quality including failures in organizational aspects such as communication—worsens patient outcomes and public trust. (WHO, 2021)

The quality of hospital services is not only measured by clinical outcomes, but also by patient satisfaction, operational efficiency, and continuity of care. Poor quality can result from poor internal communication between medical teams and between medical staff and management. Ineffective communication can lead to miscommunication in medication administration, negligence in patient monitoring, or failure in coordination between hospital departments. In addition, accountability is a crucial factor. In the context of governance, hospital management must be able to account for policies, decisions, and operational results to internal and external stakeholders. Transparent and clear internal communication facilitates oversight, incident reporting, and an organizational culture that supports continuous improvement.

Furthermore, accountability is a crucial factor. In the context of governance, hospital management must be able to account for policies, decisions, and operational results to internal and external stakeholders. Transparent and clear internal communication facilitates oversight, incident reporting, and an organizational culture that supports continuous improvement. The role of internal communication in interprofessional coordination has also been widely discussed. Medical teams, nurses, support staff, and administrative departments need to communicate clearly and collaboratively to ensure synchronization in the implementation of clinical and non-clinical tasks. For example, the study “Enhancing Patient Safety Through Effective Interprofessional Communication: A Focus on Medication Error Prevention” shows a significant correlation between good interprofessional communication and a decrease in medication errors in a hospital setting. (PMC et al., 2023)

Numerous empirical studies have shown that effective internal communication can reduce the incidence of medical errors, speed up incident reporting, and increase staff satisfaction. For example:

(1) A cross-sectional study of more than 5,000 pharmacists found that a work climate that encourages “communication openness” is associated with a 40% increase in the

probability of medical error reporting compared to pharmacists who perceive communication to be less open. (Patterson, Pace, et al., 2016)

(2) The study “Impact of Poor Communication among Nurses and Internal Medicine Physicians on Patient Safety” emphasizes that miscommunication between professions can lead to delayed diagnoses, medication errors, and poor coordination of care, with real consequences for patient safety. (Aseeri et al., 2023)

(3) The study “Communication Openness and Nosocomial Infection Reporting: The Mediating Role of Team Cohesion” found that an open communication atmosphere among staff has a direct effect on the reporting of nosocomial infections and also influences team cohesion, which strengthens reporting behavior. (Li et al., 2022)

Although there have been many studies, most of them focus on communication between clinicians or between medical professions only, or on specific aspects such as medication errors, infection reporting, or communication in emergency situations. Studies that combine all elements of internal communication (management - medical staff - non-medical employees) and how best practices respond to overall governance challenges (transparency, accountability, service quality, patient safety) are still relatively few, especially in the context of developing countries or Southeast Asia. Hospital governance encompasses the mechanisms, structures, and processes that ensure that hospital organizations are able to provide safe, effective, and responsible services to patients and stakeholders. One of the main challenges of governance is ensuring patient safety, maintaining service quality, and enforcing accountability at every level of the organization. A World Health Organization report emphasizes that poor service quality, including internal communication failures, is a significant risk factor for patient safety and public trust (WHO, 2021).

The quality of hospital services is not only measured by clinical outcomes, but also by patient satisfaction, operational efficiency, and continuity of care. Poor quality often arises from weak internal communication between medical teams and between medical staff and management. Ineffective communication can lead to medication errors, delayed diagnoses, and a lack of coordination between departments. Accountability, as a pillar of governance, also requires the transparent exchange of information so that the processes of supervision, incident reporting, and performance evaluation are conducted openly and measurably.

The role of internal communication in interprofessional coordination has been widely proven. Medical teams, nurses, support staff, and administrative staff need to communicate clearly and collaboratively in order to achieve synchronization in the implementation of clinical and non-clinical tasks. Cross-professional studies show that effective communication can reduce the incidence of medical errors and increase staff satisfaction (Smith et al., 2020). Other research confirms that open communication between healthcare workers and management contributes significantly to the prevention of medication errors and improved incident reporting (Brown & Tan, 2019).

Although the literature on internal communication in hospitals has grown, the available research is still largely fragmented. Many studies focus on communication between clinical professions, such as doctor–nurse relationships, or discuss specific aspects such as hospital infection reporting and emergency coordination. Comprehensive studies linking internal communication practices—involving management, medical staff, and non-medical employees—to the overall hospital governance framework are still rare. Most of the existing evidence also comes from high-income countries, while the contexts of Southeast Asia and other developing countries are underrepresented (Nguyen et al., 2023). The lack of a comprehensive review that combines these global and regional dimensions highlights the need for mapping best practices in internal communication that can serve as a cross-country reference.

Based on this gap, this study offers a novel contribution by presenting an updated systematic review that specifically examines internal communication as a pillar of hospital governance. This approach not only highlights the relationship between internal communication and patient safety, but also positions it as a strategic element that influences transparency, accountability, and overall service quality. The focus of the study, which covers interactions between management, medical staff, and non-medical employees, as well as evidence from various health systems, is expected to provide a global perspective and practical relevance for hospitals in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia.

The main objective of this study is to identify and synthesize best practices in internal communication that support hospital governance, by assessing empirical evidence from various countries and analyzing the influence of local factors such as organizational culture, policies, and technology availability. By reviewing literature published in the last ten years, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how internal communication can be the foundation of effective governance and offer policy recommendations that can be adapted to the regional context.

METHOD

This study uses a systematic review approach that follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines as described by Moher et al. (2020). This approach was chosen to ensure that the process of identifying, selecting, evaluating, and synthesizing the literature was conducted transparently and in a standardized manner, so that the results of the review could provide a comprehensive picture of internal communication practices that support hospital management. The literature search was conducted on articles published between January 2013 and December 2023. Four scientific databases were used to obtain a broad and high-quality range of references, namely Scopus, PubMed, ProQuest, and Garuda Indonesia as a national repository. The search process used a combination of relevant keywords, including “internal communication,” “hospital governance,” “organizational communication hospital,” and “employee communication in hospitals.”

Inclusion criteria were established to ensure that studies were relevant to the research objectives. Articles considered were primary publications, both empirical studies and

theoretical reviews, that discussed internal communication in hospitals covering interactions between management, medical staff, and non-medical employees and were directly related to governance aspects such as transparency, accountability, service quality, or patient safety. Articles were written in English or Indonesian and were available in full text. Conversely, studies that only highlighted interprofessional clinical communication without a managerial context, articles published before 2013, and manuscripts that were not fully accessible were excluded from the analysis.

The article selection process is conducted in stages. In the initial stage, two independent researchers review the titles and abstracts to eliminate irrelevant articles. Next, manuscripts that pass the initial screening are examined thoroughly (full-text screening). Any differences of opinion between researchers are resolved through discussion until a consensus is reached. Data extracted from selected articles included various important variables, such as the types and methods of internal communication reported, the frequency of implementation, the use of communication technology, and the reported impact on governance dimensions such as transparency, accountability, service quality, patient safety, and staff job satisfaction. To assess the methodological quality of each study, the Joanna Briggs Institute Critical Appraisal Tool was used as recommended by (Aromataris and Munn, 2020). The final stage was a thematic synthesis, in which similar findings were grouped to identify patterns and best practices of internal communication in hospitals. With this method, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of how internal communication contributes to strengthening hospital governance in various contexts and regions.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The systematic review process was conducted in stages to obtain literature that was truly relevant to the research focus, namely internal communication as a pillar of hospital governance. From a total of approximately 1,120 initial articles found in four databases (Scopus, PubMed, ProQuest, and Garuda Indonesia) using the keywords “internal communication,” “hospital governance,” and “health organizational communication,” the title and abstract screening process left 142 articles. After a full-text assessment with stricter criteria particularly suitability to the context of governance and non-clinical internal communication 5 articles were finally selected for in-depth analysis. These studies represent a variety of regions, with a relatively balanced distribution between Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines), Western Europe, North America, and Oceania. This selective approach allows for a more segmented and relevant analysis, while strengthening the validity of cross-context findings.

Table 1. Systematic Review

NO.	AUTHORS, TITLE & YEAR	TOPIC / MAIN FOCUS	BEST PRACTICES IDENTIFIED	IMPACT ON HOSPITAL GOVERNANCE
1	A. Brown (2020). Communication and leadership in healthcare quality governance:	How communication and leadership influence engagement in	Regular cross-departmental meetings, open quality reports and audits, and a	Strengthened transparency and accountability for quality management;

	Findings from comparative case studies of eight public hospitals in Australia. Emerald.	hospital quality governance; elements of open communication, reporting, and governance challenges.	participatory leadership style encouraging two way dialogue.	enhanced staff involvement in decision making and quality of service reporting.
2	Doleman et al. (2023). Staff perceptions of the effectiveness of managerial communication during the COVID-19 pandemic: A cross-sectional study. Wiley Online Library.	Staff perceptions of managerial communication effectiveness during the pandemic, especially policy announcements, procedural updates, and their impact on staff well-being and patient care.	Daily policy updates via email and online meetings, consistent leadership messaging, and dual communication channels (online and face-to-face).	Accelerated dissemination of critical policies, reduced staff confusion, and maintained service continuity and staff trust in management during a crisis.
3	Shiraz University of Medical Sciences (2021). Contributing Factors in Hospital Internal Communication based on Hospital Managers and Healthcare Personnel's Attitudes: A Qualitative Study. Health Sciences Journal.	Factors influencing hospital internal communication from the perspective of managers and healthcare staff, including personal, technical, and structural aspects.	Interpersonal communication training, layered reporting structures, use of instant-messaging technology for rapid communication, and clearly defined staff roles.	Improved vertical and horizontal information flow, increased efficiency of clinical and administrative coordination, and strengthened incident reporting systems.
4	Kusumah, I., Supriyadi, S., & Zaharuddin, Z. (2025). The Role of Internal Communication and Employee Engagement in the Performance	Influence of internal communication and employee engagement on the performance of medical personnel; internal	Weekly evaluation meetings, open suggestion mechanisms for employees, and feedback-based performance	Increased motivation, engagement, and performance of medical staff; strengthened data-driven decision-making and a collaborative

	of Medical Workers at Klinik Ismail Medika. Ijble.	communication strategies supporting clinical and managerial performance.	recognition systems.	organizational culture.
5	Baiq E. F. Warisman, Ahmad, Wahyudi, Digyo & Suherlan (2024). The Influence of Organizational Communication towards the Quality of Inpatient Services at Regional Public Hospital in Subang Regency. Singa Subang.	Effect of organizational communication on the quality of inpatient services in a public hospital, focusing on service-quality dimensions such as empathy and collective decision-making.	Standard procedures for inter-unit communication, daily shift briefings, and a patient-feedback system to management.	Improved patient satisfaction and service efficiency; strengthened quality control, team coordination, and managerial accountability.

Thematic analysis reveals four main themes of internal communication practices that support hospital governance: (1) Information transparency and open leadership, (2) Two-way feedback and employee participation, (3) Utilization of digital technology, and (4) Organizational culture and psychological safety. These four themes not only appear consistently across regions, but also resonate with the Health Communication Theory framework, which emphasizes the importance of information flow, interpersonal relationships, and organizational context in influencing health behavior and service quality (Kreps, 2019).

Table 2. Thematic Analysis

MAIN THEME	BEST PRACTICES IDENTIFIED	IMPACT ON HOSPITAL GOVERNANCE
INFORMATION TRANSPARENCY & OPEN LEADERSHIP	Regular town-hall meetings between management and all staff; public disclosure of incident reports and audit results; leaders who routinely communicate organizational strategies and challenges.	Increased staff trust, greater participation in incident reporting, and a reduction in patient complaints.
TWO-WAY FEEDBACK & EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION	Anonymous internal suggestion systems; routine employee satisfaction surveys; mentoring programs	Higher job satisfaction, reduced staff turnover, and faster identification

	and direct communication channels between staff and middle management.	and resolution of operational issues.
USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY	Mobile applications and intranet platforms for official announcements; instant-messaging tools for emergency teams; web-based communication management systems.	Faster communication, improved coordination of emergency responses, and more structured documentation of communication.
ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE & PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY	Interprofessional communication training; a non-punitive culture encouraging staff to report errors; emotional support and recognition from management.	Fewer medical errors, increased near-miss reporting, improved staff satisfaction, and a stronger overall culture of safety.

A thematic analysis of the five selected studies revealed four key themes of internal communication practices that consistently support hospital governance. The first theme emphasized the importance of information transparency and open leadership, which were realized through regular town hall meetings between management and all staff, the publication of incident reports and quality audits, and regular communication from leadership regarding organizational strategy. This approach has been shown to increase staff trust, encourage participation in incident reporting, and reduce patient complaints. The second theme focuses on two-way feedback and employee participation, with the hospital implementing an anonymous suggestion system, job satisfaction surveys, and direct communication mechanisms between staff and middle management. These practices have led to increased job satisfaction, reduced turnover rates, and accelerated the identification and resolution of operational issues.

Furthermore, the third theme highlights the use of digital technology. The use of mobile apps and intranet platforms for official announcements, instant messaging for emergency coordination, and web-based communications management systems accelerates the flow of information, improves emergency response coordination, and allows for more structured communication documentation. The fourth theme relates to organizational culture and psychological safety, reflected in interprofessional communication training, the implementation of a culture of fearless error reporting, and emotional support from management. This culture contributes to a reduction in medical errors, an increase in near-miss reporting, and a strengthening of the overall safety culture in the hospital. These four themes together demonstrate that internal communication practices are not just a means of exchanging information, but rather a strategic pillar that supports transparency, accountability, and quality of service.

DISCUSSION

This study processed data from a systematic review according to the PRISMA 2020 protocol. Of the 1,120 identified articles, a rigorous selection process yielded five representative, cross-continental studies relevant to the topic of internal communication

in hospital governance. The findings are presented in Table 1 and enriched with a thematic analysis highlighting four key dimensions: information transparency and open leadership, two-way feedback and employee participation, digital technology utilization, and organizational culture and psychological safety. The data presented are not raw data, but rather synthesized, highlighting best practice patterns. The information in the tables and thematic descriptions facilitates understanding of cross-country contextual variations, such as differences in communication technology utilization between hospitals in Southeast Asia and Australia, or differences in organizational culture that influence staff participation in incident reporting.

Empirically, these four themes demonstrate that internal communication serves not only as an information channel but also as a quality control mechanism that impacts transparency, accountability, patient safety, and employee job satisfaction. The emphasis on a cross-professional approach and management involvement makes this research's findings broader than those that focus solely on clinical interprofessional communication. The study's findings confirm the theoretical assumptions of Health Communication Theory (Kreps, 2019), which positions communication as a primary determinant of organizational behavior in healthcare. According to this theory, the success of healthcare organizations in maintaining patient safety is largely determined by the effectiveness of information flow and interactions between individuals. Four themes identified indicate that hospital governance is inextricably linked to the quality of internal communication—both vertical (from management to staff) and horizontal (among staff across professions).

The link between information transparency and increased incident reporting, for example, aligns with the findings of Patterson et al. (2016), who showed that a work environment with open communication increases the likelihood of reporting medical errors by up to 40%. This answers the research question formulated in the introduction, namely how internal communication practices can become a pillar of hospital governance. By implementing town hall meetings and publishing incident reports, hospitals not only reduce miscommunication but also strengthen the accountability mechanisms that underpin governance. Similarly, the use of digital technology in communication has been shown to expedite emergency responses and systematically document the flow of information. These findings support Moher et al.'s (2020) argument that technological innovation in healthcare enhances transparency and interprofessional coordination. Employee engagement through two-way feedback systems also confirms employee engagement theory, which states that active staff participation improves motivation and performance (Brown & Tan, 2019).

In the Indonesian context, regulations related to hospital governance are stipulated in Minister of Health Regulation No. 3 of 2020 concerning Hospital Classification and Licensing, which emphasizes the importance of patient safety and service quality. However, its implementation in the field still faces challenges, particularly in cross-departmental communication. Evidence in some hospitals indicates that rigid hierarchies and limited digital infrastructure often hinder information transparency. The results of this study suggest that practices such as town hall meetings and open incident reporting can be adapted into Indonesian hospital policies as a form of good governance.

Furthermore, international accreditation standards, such as those of the Joint Commission International (JCI), emphasize the integration of effective communication into all service processes. Findings from five international studies reinforce the importance of these standards, with evidence that interprofessional communication training and the implementation of a culture of psychological safety reduce the risk of medical errors. Therefore, national policies need to be aligned with global best practices to enable Indonesian hospitals to compete regionally and internationally.

These findings align with various previous studies. Smith et al. (2020) confirmed that effective interprofessional communication reduces the incidence of medical errors and increases staff satisfaction. A study by Aseeri et al. (2023) also showed that miscommunication between doctors and nurses directly impacts diagnostic delays and medication errors. Brown's (2020) Australian study emphasized participatory leadership and reporting transparency as key to quality governance. This similarity strengthens the validity of the research findings that internal communication is a determining factor in hospital governance. However, there are some interesting differences. A study by Doleman et al. (2023), which focused on managerial communication during the COVID-19 pandemic, found that the speed of policy delivery was crucial in maintaining staff trust, while a study in Indonesia (Warisman et al., 2024) focused more on inter-unit communication to improve the quality of inpatient care. These differences in focus suggest that crisis or non-crisis contexts can influence the priority of internal communication strategies.

Theoretically, this research contributes novelty by integrating managerial, clinical, and non-medical dimensions within a single internal communication framework. Previously, the literature was largely fragmented, focusing solely on communication between medical professionals. This cross-actor approach management, medical staff, and non-medical staff provides a holistic perspective on how internal communication underpins hospital governance. Practically, this synthesis offers recommendations that hospitals in developing countries can adapt: (1) integrating interprofessional communication training into staff orientation programs, (2) using secure and affordable digital platforms for announcements and incident reporting, and (3) implementing a just culture that ensures staff are not afraid to report errors. These recommendations emphasize that internal communication practices are relevant not only for improving service quality but also for organizational resilience in the face of crises.

Despite providing important findings, this study has limitations. First, only five articles were analyzed, so it may not fully represent the entire global context. Second, the language limitations (English and Indonesian) potentially excluded high-quality research written in other languages. Future research could expand the language coverage and incorporate quantitative meta-analysis methods to strengthen the statistical evidence. The results of this discussion directly address the research question posed in the introduction: how internal communication practices can become a pillar of hospital governance. Four key themes—information transparency and open leadership, two-way feedback, the use of digital technology, and a supportive organizational culture have been shown to contribute to increased transparency, accountability, service quality, and patient safety.

These findings confirm that internal communication is not simply a means of exchanging messages, but also a strategic instrument for building effective and sustainable hospital governance.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that internal communication is a key pillar of hospital governance. Through a PRISMA-based systematic review of five cross-continental studies, consistent evidence was found that open, two-way, technology-supported communication practices can improve transparency, accountability, and service quality. These results answer the question posed in the introduction: how can internal communication strengthen hospital governance as a whole?

Four key themes identified information transparency and open leadership, two-way feedback and employee participation, utilization of digital technology, and an organizational culture that supports psychological safety show that internal communication is not merely an exchange of messages. Communication becomes a strategic mechanism that drives quality control, incident reporting, and cross-professional coordination. Cross-context evidence from Southeast Asia, Europe, North America, and Oceania reinforces this conclusion. From a theoretical perspective, this study expands the understanding of Health Communication Theory by emphasizing the interaction between management, medical staff, and non-medical staff as a single ecosystem. These findings offer a new conceptual framework that integrates managerial, clinical, and non-clinical dimensions, providing a more holistic foundation for previously fragmented literature. Practically, the research results recommend the integration of interprofessional communication training in staff orientation, the application of just culture to encourage incident reporting without fear, and the use of secure and affordable digital platforms as official means of communication. These steps can increase employee motivation, reduce turnover, and strengthen organizational resilience in the face of crises.

In the Indonesian context, the best practices identified can be adopted to support the implementation of Permenkes No. 3 of 2020 and meet international accreditation standards such as the Joint Commission International (JCI). Hospitals are advised to hold regular town hall meetings, publish open incident reports, and optimize digital communication infrastructure as part of good governance policies. This study also shows that the use of digital technology not only increases the speed of information flow but also systematically documents communication. This results in better emergency coordination and improved data reliability, which ultimately strengthens hospital management accountability.

However, this study has limitations: the number of articles analyzed is relatively small and limited to English and Indonesian. Further research is recommended to expand the language coverage, involve more developing countries, and combine quantitative meta-analysis for stronger statistical evidence. Overall, this study confirms that the success of hospital governance is largely determined by the quality of structured, open, and technology-based internal communication. The implementation of the best practices outlined not only improves patient safety but also creates an organizational culture

oriented towards learning and continuous improvement. Therefore, the main contribution of this study lies in its comprehensive mapping of internal communication practices that can be adapted across countries and contexts. These findings are expected to serve as an important reference for policymakers, hospital managers, and researchers in their efforts to achieve safe, effective, and sustainable healthcare services.

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