

Discursive traces of patienthood in hospital discharge summaries: a picture of the genre's hybridity

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Hospital discharge summary (HDS) is a handover document which reports to other medical professionals on the patient's stay at hospital and includes information necessary for the effective transition and continuity of care afterwards (Stopford et al. 2015). Bearing in mind that the document is generated on the basis of the activities of many medical professionals, an inherent feature of the genre is its multivoicedness. Moreover, its recommendations may be targeted not only at the patient concerned, thus it is not always clear who is in fact the addressee of the information in the discharge summary. Different healthcare systems make the document available to medical professionals as well as the patient themselves (and/or their family members). Following the leitmotif of the workshop call, i.e. inclusivity in healthcare communication, our aim is to address the issue of the *symbolic inclusion* of the patient's perspective in the genre, which may be realised in a variety of ways (or not at all) and this may have particular consequences. Since the hospital discharge document represents primarily institutional discourse, the question may be whether it retains the (medical) professional character and, if so, to what extent it is addressed to the patient and tailored to their communicative competences.

Referring to the concept of *voices* in healthcare communication (Mishler 1984; Barry et al. 2001), this exploratory qualitative discourse analysis is based on a dataset of discharge documents from healthcare institutions in Poland, the UK and the USA. With a view to capturing the patient's presence and their communicative inclusion, we have examined the HDS texts for their communicative functions as well as patients' textual presence. Our aim is to uncover the discursive forms of

- indexing (personal) participants, notably the patient;
- formulating post-hospitalisation recommendations as referring to the patient (incl. direct address);
- making specialist terminology accessible to the patient;
- quoting the patient's reports and complaints directly and indirectly.

The results have shown that although the patient is one of the main addressees of HDSs, they are characterised by a hybrid style and discursive incommensurability. Consequently, these documents tend to foreground medical procedures and background the communicative needs of the patient.

Ultimately, we are seeking to increase the awareness of the parties involved of the function and significance of the discharge summary as the less researched medical documentation genre. This awareness raising, followed by the remodelling of practitioners' practices, is believed to bring improved patient outcomes.

References

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