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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring the Challenges and Needs of Arab Patients for Arabic Communication in Malaysian Healthcare Public Relations

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ABSTRACT

Arabic communication is fundamental particularly for the Malaysian healthcare industry that handles the raising number of Arab patients coming to Malaysia to seek healthcare treatment. However, studies showed that most Arab patients are unable to speak other than their mother tongue language which is Arabic language, and they are very attached to their unique culture, which makes them prefer specialized services at healthcare centers. Thus, this research aims at acquiring the challenges faced by Arab patients and their utmost needs toward Arabic communication aspects to be addressed by healthcare personnel while attending them. This qualitative research employed semi-structured interview using needs analysis theory by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) toward 6 Arab patients at 5 different selected healthcare centers in Klang valley. The results demonstrated that the informants faced communication problems with limited understanding of formal Arabic including management and promotional issues. In addressing these problems, informants indicated their needs toward a competent healthcare public relations personnel who are able to assist them in their communication issues especially related to translation and interpretation, as well as knowledgeable in Arabic dialects and culture to boost effective communication. Good handling of Arabic communication with Arab patients has the potential to expedite the overall processes and procedures at all levels of healthcare management and hinder unprecedented problems throughout the entire process.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by investigating the communication challenges faced by Arab patients in Malaysian healthcare settings, a topic that has received limited attention. It is one of the few studies that uses needs analysis theory to explore the specific linguistic and cultural needs of Arab patients, documenting their unique requirements for effective healthcare public relations in Malaysia.

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1. Introduction

The influx of Arab tourists and immigrants from the Middle East such as from Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, to Malaysia to receive treatment and healthcare services began to increase significantly since 2006 (Dahlui & Aziz, 2012). The healthcare services offered at healthcare centers or hospitals in Malaysia have received excellent satisfaction among Arab patients who come for several factors including reasonable cost, the good attitude of the healthcare center administrator and management, the comfortable atmosphere and environment as well as offering Islamic friendly medical services (Rahman et al., 2021; Rashid & Al-Shami, 2022). Since then, several efforts have been done in order to promote medical services in Malaysia and at the same time aimed at making Malaysia as a healthcare service hub in ASEAN region during that particular time, and that by initiating the international customer departments to provide assistance in term of admission and support, later establishing an association namely the Association of Private Hospitals of Malaysia to compete vigorously with international healthcare industries worldwide (Dahlui & Aziz, 2012). This effort is an eye-opening experience among Arab patients coming to Malaysia seeking for their desired treatment at local healthcare centers.

In providing the best healthcare services toward patients, especially those patients who are unable to understand English language or any other languages except their mother tongue language (Slade & Sergeant, 2023), a special assistance in terms of services from healthcare providers is one of the most needed action or effort that is able to help patients, for them to be able to communicate well in a comfortable way while they are receiving the treatments from the healthcare centers. Communication factor is crucial to be highlighted between patients and healthcare providers including medical officers, nurses, and administrators. Failure to settle this communication aspect from the first place, will later affect the other processes and procedures which at certain circumstances, may be dangerous and harmful to the patients such as misunderstanding of medical decisions and misinterpretation of diagnosis (Ellahham, 2021).

The issues in communication are very much relatable to the patients' safety. Patient's safety is the highest priority being taken into account by healthcare providers to accommodate healthcare services which are fully trusted by the patients. A good communication will simultaneously dodge the safety issues that might happen at all levels of the medical and management process at the healthcare centers (Mitchell, 2023). Good mastery of language will ease not only to the medical officers in order for them to understand patients' medical conditions, but also to the patients, to understand completely medical information given by the medical officers, and at the same time expedite the consultation process as well as other procedures at all related departments at the healthcare centers (Ekladious et al., 2023).

Public relations in the healthcare setting play a major role in making sure that the patient as the main client is handled and managed properly at healthcare centers. Public Relations Society of America (PRSA, 2012) has defined public relations as professionals in the area of strategic communication in order to cultivate mutually advantageous relationships between organizations and their clients. Public relations practitioners in this 4.0 era are practicing a significant responsibility in effectively overseeing the communication aspects. One of the essential roles played by public relations officers is solving the problem and facilitating communication as they also serve as mediators and

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interpreters who aim at eliminating any obstacles hindering effective communication (Utami & Alifiana, 2020).

In the context of Arabs, one thing that is very fundamental to the strength of this nation besides the language is the aspect of Arab culture itself. Arab culture is formed in their identity, as the concept of culture itself is based on social collective values in communities, principles, and attitudes (Hofstede, 1980). The cultural orientation of Arab society has its own specialty and differs according to the Arab countries, especially those from the Middle East, although Arab culture is said to be closely related to the religious aspect (Hofstede, 2011). These differences create the urging needs in understanding Arabic culture and practicing it while attending Arab patients at the healthcare centers. Concerning their unique culture will lead to their satisfaction as this action is a sign to a professional and quality of service offered because patient satisfaction is a straightforward measurement of healthcare service quality (Mahfouz et al. 2021).

However, language barriers often occur when there is a difference in native language by both patient and medical officers. In this critical situation, patients mostly rely on informal interpreters among family members or friends to help them translate the information and deliver it in their own way, which somehow the information given is incorrectly translated. A solution to this problem is by having a trained interpreter services to improve healthcare services, patients' communication and satisfaction (Slade & Sergeant, 2023). Even though having the interpreter service will raise the cost and the length of treatment visit among the patients, the necessity of sustaining and maintaining patients' safety by gaining and providing correct and understandable information is crucial to avoid unprecedented circumstances. This language barrier issue by all means needs to be addressed and solved in order to achieve the highest level of satisfaction among all parties involved including medical officers, patient and healthcare providers (Al Shamsi et al., 2020).

In addition, previous study also suggested the exploration of the Arabic- speaking patients' perspectives toward the challenges and necessities of Arabic linguistic communication in the healthcare context. The linguistic aspect including the cultural nuances is essential to be studied in the healthcare setting for the purpose of ensuring the quality of service offered, building trust between patient and healthcare provider as well as optimizing patient outcome (Al-Yateem et al., 2023). Patients' perspectives which are derived from their own experience and opinion will contribute in solving the challenges and barriers related to linguistic communication at healthcare centers (Khalid et al., 2021) due to their limitation and lack of understanding of other languages including English language (Rahman et al., 2021). Therefore, in this study, a needs analysis was conducted among Arab patients who came to local and private healthcare centers seeking treatments in order to explore the challenges they face and their needs for Arabic communication particularly in Malaysian healthcare public relations.

1.1. Research Objectives

i. To explore Arab patients' experiences in communicating with the PR officer.
ii. To investigate the needs of Arab patients in addressing the improvement of healthcare providers.

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2. Literature Review

Healthcare is one of the main sectors in determining the level of successful development of a country apart from looking at other sectors such as the economy and education. Based on the data released by the World Health Organization (WHO) (2003), the main objectives of the healthcare system are focused on good health, responsiveness to any expectations as well as fair financial distribution and contribution.

Al Hubaishi and Ali (2022) in their study stated that the provision of the highest quality healthcare services is a major concern for all countries through the empowerment of the health performance of the population as well as managing healthcare centers through hospitals and clinics effectively and efficiently. Numerous improvements are needed in various aspects of the healthcare sector, especially the primary healthcare system. The study conducted by Al Asmri et al. (2020) highlighted the main key areas of improvement among the main ones are the aspects of facilities and infrastructures, increased demand, and workforce capacity. Meanwhile, the challenges for all these key areas of improvements are more towards shortcoming in terms of access to the quality and safety healthcare services apart from the constraints of the management and leadership issues and the delivery of good and effective information in the healthcare sector.

According to Rahman et al. (2021), healthcare achievements can also be measured through patients' loyalty and intention toward the healthcare center for their desired treatment. Some of other factors impacting on patients' satisfaction are administrative behavior, healthcare centers environment, managerial consideration as well as medical officers' and nurses' services. These factors all together will lead to greater service integration and higher service quality of healthcare centers. Rahman et al. (2023) also explained that it is crucial to provide good healthcare services to the patients as they have the influence of word of mouth (WoM) marketing for the best healthcare services they gained from the healthcare centers. For promotional and marketing wise, it is a very advantageous approach to be taken into consideration by all healthcare centers.

Medical tourism or also known as health tourism is also one of the global healthcare patterns among international patients all around the world Okasha et al. (2022). Yildiz and Khan (2019) in their study have surveyed international patients seeking healthcare on their preference on getting healthcare services abroad because of high medical service cost in the home country, shortage of insurance coverage and the issue of long waiting times for certain treatment and procedures to be carried out. Patients' decision to travel internationally is also influenced by a number of interesting factors in the destination countries, such as perceived high quality of medical services. Collins et al. (2022) and Habibi et al. (2022) also stressed that success factors in medical tourism or health tourism are depending on accessibility, affordability, waiting time, human and technological factors, as well as proven accredited quality of healthcare by the centers.

In the healthcare industry, public relations play a major role in various communication aspects which aim at establishing and maintaining the positive reputation of healthcare centers by meeting the expectations of clients and achieving public relations competency quality (Knight & Sweetser, 2021). Public relations profession requires proficiency in communication, a holistic mindset, efficient time management, and creative thinking. These qualities substantially influence the reputation of the healthcare centers (Khan, Khan & Naeem, 2021). In particular of public relations officers who are attending Arab

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patients in healthcare centers, Arabic communication is considered a pivotal element to be equipped by public relations officers in managing and handling Arab patients, and that includes the ability to do translation and interpretation services in assisting medical officers during consultation, diagnosis, prescription and treatment (Alanazi, 2022) and at the same time to be well understand and knowledgeable of Arabic culture for global public relations practices (Al-Kandari et al., 2019).

Al-Jumaili et al. (2020) have conducted research on barriers to healthcare access for Arabic-speaking population, and the result showed that there is a pressing need toward an interpreter at the healthcare centers to assist those with inadequate health literacy, especially those new arriving Arab patients. Whitaker et al. (2022) argued that interpretation services are underused in healthcare in relation to the need of them, and most of the patients preferred informal interpreting from family members or friends, which actually not really good with the best practice in healthcare because it might in some point lead to misinterpretation and later affect the diagnosis result and treatment decision. Slade and Sergent (2023) stressed in their research that having trained healthcare personnel to be the interpreter between the patients and medical officers is very important to ease every process at the centers, such as consultation, follow up, medication and discharge instructions.

A study by Al-Yateem et al. (2023) added, professional interpreters in healthcare are very significant to bridge the language barrier. Interpretation skills will contribute to effective communication between Arab patients and healthcare professionals which are also able to reinforce overall care experience. Reason for this is that Arabic interpreters have fundamental knowledge of basic medical terminology in Arabic, and this will undoubtedly foster better communication processes in healthcare settings. In addition to having the interpreter in healthcare, Whitaker et al. (2022) stated that it is necessary for the healthcare centers to have comprehensive guidance or guidelines on a set of systematically collected evidence for language support to be utilized by healthcare professionals and professional interpreters. This guidance or guidelines serve as a framework on Arabic communication for the purpose of healthcare and directly touch on the concept of Arabic language, communication and basic medical terminologies in Arabic language. A proper guidelines and framework like this will clarify the nature of interpreter job scope and at the same time provide an overall process of Arabic communication in healthcare settings for general use not only to the interpreters but also to other related healthcare professionals.

Communication is a vital component of human interaction and daily life activities. Clear and good communication is also crucial for healthcare systems because the service delivery of safe, effective, and high-quality healthcare depends on clear and accurate communication (Al-Yateem et al., 2023). For Arabic communication, particularly with native Arabic speakers among Arab, Alkhaled et al. (2022) revealed that understanding linguistic and cultural differences are the primary challenges, as these elements need to be practiced in Arabic communication in order to gain patients' satisfaction apart from other added values such as compassion, respect and care toward patients. Having linguistic problems in healthcare management will also cause a long process for every phase of healthcare service delivery. For this reason, having professional and specialized interpreter service may sort out communication issues and problems that lead to the delay in healthcare treatment.

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Al-Yateem et al. (2023) through their research again emphasized on resolving language barriers in healthcare services as ordinary healthcare personnel are uncommonly well versed in Arabic language with the knowledge of medical terminologies in Arabic language, plus the patients are only able to speak in Arabic language, and not in other languages. Their study also revealed that healthcare personnel at some points felt guilty, scared and full of dissatisfaction due to their inability in conveying medical information clearly because of this language barrier. They suggested that healthcare professionals must be very holistic and active in learning basic medical terminologies in Arabic language to be able to speak with their patients in their native language, considering their cultural sensitivity to be taken into account.

Discussing the capabilities of healthcare professionals or specialized interpreters to be able to master the Arabic language with basic knowledge of medical terminologies in Arabic, learning opportunities should also be highlighted to provide a comprehensive course or module in learning Arabic language for the purpose of healthcare settings. Learning Arabic for specific purposes like this is one of a highly potential scope that caters to specific settings and workplace. Musling and Yazid (2019) proposed that learning Arabic for specific purposes is very suitable for every situation to understand and master Arabic language and communication in specialized areas of work. A needs analysis study is always essential to be conducted as it is considered as a primary process to gain information regarding the learners' necessities. For the workplace setting, it is very important to have the mindset of the workers or officers who are willing to make improvements and changes for the betterment of work outcomes. Their study employed Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) needs analysis model which incorporates the element of lacks, necessities and wants.

Previous studies have shown that Arabic communication aspects in healthcare settings are very important to be focused on especially through the specialized healthcare professionals, like interpreters to ease communication process at healthcare centers. However, the focus on the real needs of the main clients itself, in this context, Arab patients still need to be studied to confirm their utmost challenges in facing these communication issues and what are their needs to be fulfilled by the healthcare providers, and to highest extend contribute to the high-quality service that is very much satisfied by the clients who seek for their desired treatments at the healthcare centers.

3. Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach through a needs analysis study using Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) theory to study Arab patients' needs for Arabic communication in healthcare public relations. Semi-structured interviews among Arab patients to view their own experience, challenges and perspective on Arabic communication issues were conducted, which applied focus group discussion to gain an in-depth understanding of social problems (Nyumba et al., 2018).

A total of 10 healthcare centers in Klang Valley were contacted to ensure the availability of PR officers who handle Arab patients. From these lists, 5 healthcare centers were selected. A convenient sampling was carried out to choose the samples from these healthcare centers. 6 Arab patients were involved in the interviews. Arab patients who had come from Arab countries seeking for treatment or living in Malaysia as an expatriate were included in this interview. The patients are termed as patient 1 (PT1), (PT2)...(PT6). Before the interviews, permission was asked from each participant to

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participate voluntarily and audiotaped as an interview protocol. The distribution of participants' gender, age and nationality is depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic information of the participants (n=6)

Patient	Gender	Age	Nationality
PT1	Male	47	Yemen
PT2	Male	33	Yemen
PT3	Female	36	Libya
PT4	Female	40	Yemen
PT5	Female	43	Yemen
PT6	Female	47	Yemen

The constructs used in this study were adapted from Rahman et al. (2018), Rahman (2019), Yildiz and Khan (2019) and Haggerty et al. (2011). The interviews were conducted online via video call which took an hour on average for each session. The recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using Nvivo version 12. With the help of this software, researchers built the codes, group codes and identified the relations between them. It is crucial to note that this software acts as a tool to facilitate the data classifying owing to the fact that researchers are the one who carry out the analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

4. Results

4.1. Lacks

From the interview's results, there are few problems faced by the Arab patients that have been highlighted and could be classified as communication problems, limited understanding in formal Arabic, unaware of the public relations officer's provision and problems in patient management.

4.1.1. Communication problems

It seems that Arab patients faced communication problems while receiving treatment, whether from the medical officers or the public relations officers himself. Examples of participants' answers:

> *"Yes, medical terminologies. And communication with the doctor itself. Sometimes the doctor does not understand the kind of disease and what do you want in precise". (PT1)*

> *"There is an officer, but I don't deal with her much. She spoke very little. I mean, she just said a simple word. The most important thing to me is listening." (PT4)*

> *"When I saw that there were translators in other countries, I said that it is nice if we have the same in Malaysia, meaning I have to go sometimes and my illness comes. I wait to go until there is someone with me so I can go and see the doctor, because I feel that the doctor does not understand me, nor do I understand the medical word. I mean, it is very nice to have a translator. Honestly, this is a great service, very helpful." (PT4)*

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4.1.2. Limited understanding in formal Arabic

Although the patients are Arab, some of the participants suffered from a lack of understanding of formal Arabic because they use colloquial Arabic in their lives. Below are the examples of their admissions:

> *"Sometimes, I swear, I don't understand formal Arabic either." (PT4)*
> *"Unfortunately, the Arabs here are not fluent in formal Arabic." (PT5)*

4.1.3. Unaware of the public relations officer's provision

From the interview, Arab patients are not aware of the public relations officer's provision in the hospital. In addition, they thought that this service comes at a cost. Participants described their regrets as below:

> *"If we know that there is a special department for translation, it is easier for the hospital or the patient to enter with the doctor, and it will attract many foreign patients." (PT4)*

> *"Most patients believe that this service is not free. They believe that they must pay an amount. Therefore, they do not go to the translation department. They seek help from themselves, or from anyone who passed by on the way, inside the hospital. This means that when I talk to my friends, there is a translation department they say, sure I will have to pay more. I tell them, no, it is a free service, without any payment." (PT5)*

> *"I want the officer to be present in the doctor's room if I need him or to know that he can provide this service. He asks me: Do you want me to be with you in the doctor's room? Because we do not know if this service is provided or not." (PT5)*

> *"It is very necessary, because most of the clinics specialize in my problems, for example delayed pregnancy and fertility issues. I booked an appointment, but they said that they do not have a translator, so this is something I found lacking." (PT3)*

4.1.4. Problems in patient management

Some Arab patients had difficulty coordinating an appointment while at work. Another stated that he needed someone to guide him through the hospital procedure and accompany him during the operation. Sample answers from participants as below:

> *"Appointment with the doctor, because it is difficult for us while I am at work. I have to go and make an appointment and then come back." (PT1)*

> *"I am in a country other than my own and I do not know anyone in the hospital. I do not know where to go. I am afraid of the operation. I am afraid, so I will not go." (PT2)*

Based on the interviews, informants appear to have difficulties particularly in communication. They also have limited understanding in formal Arabic since they are

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more eloquent in Arabic colloquial. Moreover, the public relations officer's provision seems to be oblivious to them as it was not brought to patients' knowledge. Lastly, they had issues in patient management such as making appointments and settling hospital's procedures. This correlates with earlier literature by Al-Yateem (2023) and Jungner et al. (2019) who highlighted language barriers between healthcare providers and patients as main hassle in delivering a quality service. Therefore, the inclusion of professional public relations officers in removing language barriers and facilitating patients in healthcare service is imperative.

4.2. Necessities

Regarding the necessities of Arab patients, several themes are determined, preferring the service of public relations officers over others, officers assisting in internal administration, proficient in Arabic, skilled in effective communication with ethical qualities.

4.2.1. Preferring the service of public relations officers over others

The researcher found that Arab patients prefer the services of public relations officers over others for a specific reason. Various perspectives can be outlined as follows:

> *"I prefer a public relations officer with the help of a friend or family member in addition." (PT1)*
>
> *"It depends on the situation. Sometimes, if the disease is normal, it may involve family members. But if you get sick and you don't want anyone to know about it, I think a public relations officer is better, because he is another person, and this is his job. He cannot tell others. I am not ashamed of him." (PT2)*
>
> *"I prefer officers, because I have privacy and I am not ashamed to complain about being sick." (PT3)*
>
> *"I prefer public relations officers because they are more familiar with the hospital, understand its departments, and it is easier for us to reach." (PT5)*
>
> *"I prefer to get help from an officer because this is his job. For example, if there is something that I do not want my family members or friends to know, he will keep the secret. This is his job." (PT6*)

4.2.2. Officers assisting in internal administration

Arab patients expressed their preference for officers who assist them in three ways; firstly, by introducing them to the translation department; secondly, by providing translation services; and thirdly, by offering administrative support.

a) Introducing the translation department

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Participants emphasized the need for introducing the translation department to ensure its availability and usefulness during hospital visits. It can be depicted in the following responses:

> *"There may be at least an advertisement next to it, the sign on the door, on the wall, because there is an Arabic translator here, it will be easy, and everyone will read for sure." (PT4)*

> *"Advertising is very important. How will the Arab patient know that there is a translation department? How can a hospital be distinguished by this department? Through advertising." (PT5)*

> *"I think that the hospital should be a major reason for acquainting with this department. Reception, doctor, and screen should introduce us to the service department." (PT5)*

> *"Facebook page. Also, once before Corona, a hospital held a group iftar. They gave us extra seats, so we invited our friends, and they got to know about the hospital. I mean, they took the idea and attended the breakfast. The invitation is good for the hospital." (PT6)*

b) Providing translation services

Apparently, the needs of translation services were much highlighted by Arab patients, stressing its importance to Arab society. The participants' demands are as follows:

> *"Help in terms of language is good. She translates everything for the doctor. In a positive and good way." (PT2)*

> *"By God, the need is necessary. Seriously, sometimes it is a struggle. Not for me, but for other people. I have known a lot of Arabs here, which means they suffer a lot from the language and how to understand it. Someone must be with them to translate. So, God willing, it has become clear that Malaysia has many Arabs in need." (PT4)*

> *"Many Arabs have visited Malaysia, whether for tourism or study, and the Arabs here, I mean, try to benefit from all services. They go to hospitals, they go to tourist attractions, and they go to shops. The sooner they find translators, the better." (PT5)*

> *"For example, in Al-Tawakal Hospital, the nice feature is that there is a translator. She explains difficult terms and helps the patient. This is, frankly, the most beautiful feature I found in Al-Tawakal Hospital." (PT5)*

c) Offering administrative support

In addition, getting administrative support such as giving information, guidance and direction were described by participants as a helpful service to obtain. Examples of participants' responses are such:

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"She helps me search for a suitable doctor and guides me to where the pharmacy is located, where the doctor is located, the doctor's appointments, and when the reservation can be made." (PT1)

"She coordinates first, and sets the date. This is the first thing. Coordination and setting the date." (PT1)

"Sometimes, for example, I need to have late reports. The doctor says reports are available on the second day. Of course, I may not be able to come back. I ask public relations to send me the report with an explanation." (PT1)

"She comes with us when registering, receiving medications, and leaving the hospital." (PT6)

4.2.3. Officers proficient in Arabic

Mastering Arabic language for a PR officer in handling Arab patients is regarded as a vital element to acquire. Three key aspects were discovered and grouped in this theme as follows:

a) Proficient in formal Arabic

Participants emphasized the importance for PR officers to be fluent in formal Arabic language that can be understood by all. Participants' answers for instance:

"The Arabic language should be formal, not specific to a particular country. Not a Yemeni dialect or an Egyptian dialect, for example. It should be understood by everyone." (Participant 2)

"If there is an officer who is proficient in Arabic and understands it, that is good, very good." (Participant 4)

b) Knowledge of Arabic medical terminology

Another significant aspect highlighted by participants is acquiring knowledge in Arabic medical terminologies. Participant 1 and 2 remarked:

"Yes, medical terminologies. And communication with the doctor itself. Sometimes the doctor does not understand the kind of disease and what do you want in precise". (PT1)

"Also on the medical side, I advise. For me, she is not just a public relations officer. I see her like a doctor. I mean, I want to inquire, how is this treatment? How is such and such? It means a problem if she keeps asking the doctor every time. But if she has at least the bare minimum of information, that is even better." (PT2)

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c) Able to comprehend different Arabic dialects

Comprehending various Arabic dialects also emerged as an important aspect. Some of participants' statements were:

> *"I like her ability to understand all the dialects." (PT3)*

> *"It is better for the officer to understand dialects because the Arabic language differs like dialects." (PT4)*

4.2.4. PR Officers skilled in effective communication

Effective communication skills are undoubtedly a strong element to be considered in public relations. Participants articulated their views like:

> *"The public relations officer is persuasive. He knows how to talk to the patient, meaning he encourages the patient, so I go to the hospital." (PT2)*

> *"Speed of communication, sincerity, speed of coordination, good reception, attention to the patient, asking the patient about any need, staying with me when she finds the doctor from outside, until I am done, which means entering and leaving the doctor. She comes with me to the pharmacy, stands with me, helps me, if I need anything." (PT5)*

4.2.5. PR officers with ethical qualities

Another prominent aspect should be taken into account also is ethical qualities. This aspect has been mentioned by many participants as below:

> *"The first characteristic for a public relations officer to have is that he must have good conduct and behavior. He must have high morals. He must be flexible in dealing." (PT1)*

> *"The first condition is patience and endurance. I have been in Malaysia for four or five years. But for example, sometimes, if a patient comes from Yemen to here, or comes from Egypt to here, they are hot-tempered. This is the nature of his country. He gets angry quickly, and he is also sick and cannot bear it. The first condition is that this officer must be able to bear it. (PT2)*

> *"Be treated well, whether you are an Arab or a Malaysian, there is no distinction. I love the system in Malaysia, I love their treatment, good treatment, and a sense of reassurance." (PT4)*

> *"She is a friend and an honest officer in her work. Honest in her work. Diligent. This is the main reason why I am advertising the hospital to my friends and relatives and everyone I know in Malaysia to go to Al-Tawakal Hospital, to the translation department, and communicate personally, with Sister Areefah because all services are available to them." (PT5)*

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> *"Very excellent, cooperative and conveyed the information well. Accompanied the patient until he went away. It was excellent, frankly." (PT6)*

Based on the above results, it is notable that participants occasionally depend on family members or companions but having public relations officers is more preferred as it ensures confidentiality. The consequences of having relatives or friends as ad hoc interpreters with lack of proficiency in medical terminology not only poses the risk of disclosing patients' secrecy, but also leading to misinterpretation and detrimental to physician-patient communication (Al-Yateem, 2023).

Apart from that, the role of PR officers is significant to assist internal administration which includes providing translation services to patients ensuring information transfer. Participants indicated that the translation services were much needed and they highlighted the importance of PR officers with ability to comprehend Arabic dialects besides mastering the formal Arabic. PR officers also have to acquire medical terminologies as research has shown the importance of being fluent in it to provide efficient treatment for patients (Hull, 2016).

Another vital component is that PR officers must be skilled in effective communication to foster patient interaction positively. Effective communication correlated well with building trust and creating constructive relationships between healthcare providers and patients (Albougami, 2015; Ratna, 2019; Greene & Ramos, 2021).

Applying ethical qualities in daily practice maintains the integrity of the PR officer. By adhering to it, PR officers are guided to the moral standards of interactions that reflect honesty, respect and compassion which underpin the healthcare profession. As mentioned by Siddoo et al. (2024), following the laws and moral standards keep trust and respect in the medical tourism sector.

4.3. Wants

Participants' perspectives in terms of their desires to encourage the growth of health tourism in Malaysia can be categorized in four aspects. Among them are the development of medical tourism, supporting language-related activities, friendly relationships with clients and preference for medical officers of the same gender.

4.31. Development of medical tourism

From the interview, participants shared their experiences on healthcare settings in Malaysia, mentioning the great medical tourism system while suggesting to elevate its promotional marketing.

a) Organized medical tourism system

Participants expressed their delights to the medical tourism system and its advancement of medical devices. Various insights by participants are as follows:

> *"The biggest advantage of health services in Malaysia is the development of medical devices. There is a great development in medical devices, and it is a true high technology in medical devices." (PT1)*

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"I honestly love the system here, the cleanliness is honestly the most important thing for me. The service here is very nice. In all hospitals, of course, for sure." (PT4)

"The system, there is a difference, ease of booking and access. This means that all hospitals deal with it through their websites. It means that I can book at home. We do not find this often in Arab hospitals. I mean that there is a system. You come, you book by number, you wait, you enter with your appointment number without being preceded by someone else." (PT5)

b) Increase the promotional marketing of medical tourism

An important point to be mentioned, the promotional marketing of the medical tourism sector should be boosted more by particular authorities to receive the appropriate attention it deserves. The following suggestions are the samples of participants' views:

"Use social media. There may be a special page for medical tourism that may be adopted by the Ministry of Health in Malaysia. The page on Facebook and other social media." (PT1)

"I suggest that there will be awareness among the communities, meaning that there is a representative of the health office to visit the communities. The Yemeni community, the Egyptian community, the Algerian community, the Libyan community to raise awareness and spread the culture of health tourism so that if the community has awareness, it will also raise awareness in various ways through social media as well as with those they know in their countries." (PT1)

4.3.2. Fostering language-related activities

Furthermore, there were also some suggestions for the PR officer to enhance their skills in Arabic language by attending Arabic course, live with the Arab society as well as practice more in writing and listening skills by utilizing the multimedia platforms. Participants' statements as shown below:

"In my opinion public relations should attend teaching Arabic to non-native speakers' course." (PT1)

"Public relations should live in Arab societies, which means he has to make friends with Arabs and even begins to communicate with them a lot to improve his language during communication and interaction. This coexistence helps a lot." (PT1)

"View programs on YouTube and others. E-learning. Listening a lot. He should have programs for listening to Arabic language lectures, programs in the Arabic language, so that listening a lot will give him new terms and also help him understand more about Arabic language." (PT1)

"Also, he should get used to writing a lot in the Arabic language. It is good if he can write a page a day and practice writing." (PT1)

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4.3.3. Friendly relationship with clients

One notable finding from the interview was the participants appreciated their friendly rapport with the PR and found comfort in such interactions. Examples of participants' feedback like:

> *"I like the relationship more than a formal relationship, a sisterly relationship." (PT3)*

> *"The officer is an intimate person, you know? She is friendly. She is a friend and relative more than an ordinary officer. She fawns over the patient and stays with him until he completes his procedures. You feel that she is not an officer, but that she is a friendly sister." (PT5)*

4.3.4. Preference for medical officer of the same gender

The participants revealed that they have a strong preference for having doctors of the same gender. Their responses are recorded as below:

> *"In terms of culture, I see that sometimes, I take my wife to a hospital, for example, they take her to a male doctor, but I want a female doctor. Or they bring me to a female doctor, but I want a male doctor." (PT2)*

> *"It is possible that, for example, a doctor in gynecology or obstetrics, I prefer to have a female doctor with me." (PT3)*

> *"Of course, I prefer women with women and men with men. In privacy." (PT6)*

Participants indicated that Malaysia needs to develop medical tourism through its system and increase promotional marketing. According to Rahman and Zilani (2016) several private hospitals and medical centers in this country have started to attract more Muslim medical tourists and therefore increase their promotional marketing. However, this emerging market needs to be given more attention and government agencies should take vigorous action on this matter. It is encouraged for PR to nurture language-related activities in any possible approach and to promote friendly relationships with patients to engage comfort dialogue. By addressing cultural preference for medical officers of the same gender, it is believed it can increase patient satisfaction.

Table 2 below is the summary of needs analysis results of Arab patients on their challenges and needs toward Arabic communication in the context of Malaysian healthcare public relations. From the results, it shows that the conditions of Arab patients in having treatment in Malaysia healthcare centers were in precarious situations and should be approached with subtle distinction and careful consideration of various factors.

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Table 2: Summary of needs analysis result

Lacks	Necessities	Wants
1. Communication problems	1. Preferring the service of public relations officers over others	1. Development of medical tourism a- Improving the medical tourism system b- Increase the promotional marketing of medical tourism
2. Limited understanding in formal Arabic	2. Officers assisting in internal administration a- Introducing the translation department b- Providing translation services c- Offering administrative support	2. Fostering language-related activities
3. Unaware of the public relations officer's provision	3. Officers proficient in Arabic a- Proficiency in formal Arabic b- Knowledge of Arabic medical terminology c- Able to comprehend different Arabic dialects	3. Friendly relationship with clients
4. Problems in patient management	4. Officers skilled in effective communication 5. Officers with ethical qualities	4. Preference for medical officers of the same gender

5. Conclusion

Most interviewees among Arab patients demonstrated their challenges mainly in communication with the limited understanding in formal Arabic language in addition to problems regarding patient management at the healthcare centers. In terms of technical aspects, they indicated that they are very unaware of the provision of public relations services to assist them at certain healthcare centers that offer these important services. To resolve these challenges, these interviewees manifested their utmost needs through their preference to have specialized and professional interpreters to assist them in the interpretation and translation process. They preferred the service of public relations officers over others for this matter including in assisting them in managing internal administration processes. The interpreters among public relations officers must be proficient in Arabic language especially formal Arabic as well as able to comprehend Arabic dialects and knowledgeable in basic medical terminologies in Arabic language. All these criteria may lead to effective communication with high ethical qualities among healthcare professionals particularly healthcare public relations. Accomplishing their needs and necessities, interviewees also required the development of medical tourism aspects, with ample language related activities among healthcare public relations, also to have friendly relationship with the clients to ease healthcare processes at the center, and lastly they preferred the medical officers or healthcare professionals from the same

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gender to specifically handle them throughout the entire process as that is part of their cultural values that need to be considered in some ways. This study suggested future research related to the design and development of Arabic communication framework which is designed specifically for the healthcare public relations industry to assist the process of attending, handling and managing Arab patients at healthcare centers.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers used the research ethics provided by the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM). All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. Consent and agreement to participate in this study was also obtained from all study participants.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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