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A CIT Investigation of Patient Deception Using Self-Discrepancy Theory

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ABSTRACT

It is widely accepted that patients knowingly lie, mislead, and deceive health care professionals working in their favor. While physicians do their best to provide patients with quality care, patient deception can not only affect service quality and patient satisfaction, but also physician effectiveness and medical outcomes. The current research consists of a qualitative investigation of this phenomenon and seeks to lay the foundation for a self-discrepancy theory perspective of patient deception.

Self-discrepancy theory (SDT) seeks to explain how emotional discomfort can be caused by conflicting beliefs about one's self. That is, a discrepancy arises and there is emotional discomfort when one views their actual self different from their ideal or ought self. The self-discrepancy is likely to lead to a desire to manage how one is viewed by others and engage in self-presentation—often by manipulating information presented to others.

In an effort to establish that self-discrepancy is indeed an issue among health care consumers, critical incident technique (CIT) was used to collect data from over 600 respondents who described a time when they intentionally deceived their health care provider.

An analytic induction process consisting of repeated reading and sorting of the incidents was used to categorize the experiences. Of the 625 incidences coded, nearly 92% (579 cases) were classified as a type of self discrepancy, thus making a strong case for the self-discrepancy theory of patient deception. Among those classified as a self-discrepancy, 64.25% are discrepancies between the actual and ideal self (A/I discrepancy). Respondents in this category were found to have dejection-related emotions likely caused by feelings that they have failed to meet the standards others hope or wish he /she would attain.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gary Daniel Futrell is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at Valdosta State University (Valdosta, GA). He earned his PhD in Marketing from Florida State University and has over fifteen years of management experience. His recent publications have been in the area of relationship marketing and services marketing.