
UNIT 1 PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION AND SUCCESSFUL INFORMATION SYSTEM

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- define and explain the concept of communication;
- list the purposes of communication and describe the importance of communication in Nursing Management;
- explain the process of communication;
- a enumerate the types of communication; and
- a describe the channels of communication.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Communication is a complex, ongoing dynamic process in which participants simultaneously create shared meaning in an interaction. For communication to be effective, a **common** understanding of the message sent and the one received must be achieved. Communication may be viewed in several ways, one of which is that of a pathway between two or more people.

Communication plays a vital role in administration of **any type** of organisation whether it be a hospital or in **any nursing institution**. Inadequate communication between management **and employees causes** misunderstanding, whereas proper communication can pave the way for better relations, greater job satisfaction on account of clarity about job requirement and **organisational** goal.

Research evidence indicates that on an average, nurses spend about 75% of their time communicating verbally, 45% listening, **30%** speaking, 16% reading and **90%** writing (Swansburg, 1990). You can see how often these communication skills are utilised in a

communication between itself and employees in order to achieve organisational goals. Developing expertise in all aspects of communication is critical to managerial success.

Let us discuss what is communication and the **importance** of communication.

1.2 THE COMMUNICATION CONCEPT

In this sub-section you will learn the concept of communication. You as a nurse to become successful communicator you must learn the concept of communication and apply it in your day to day life.

1.2.1 Definition

Communication in simple terms can be defined as sharing of thoughts, feelings and ideas from one person to another.

Hubber (1996), stated that communication is the art of being able to structure and transmit a message in a way that another person can easily understand or accept.

Newman and Summer define communication as an exchange of facts, ideas, opinions or emotions by two or more persons.

Communication may be viewed in several ways, one of which is that of a pathway between two people. Far too **often**, although both parties are talking, neither is actually communicating. Both intend upon making a point, getting their way, or hurrying through conversation. For example, Sister **incharge** may talk "down" to the staff nurse and effective communication is not achieved because little communication goes back "up" the pathway.

Effective communication occurs when two people are talking and **listening** each other at the same time. Communication is a two way process and administrators must listen to what staff members tell them directly or indirectly. The above discussion clearly indicate that communication is a two way process. If the receiver does not understand or respond to the message of the sender, communication is ineffective. Just as the act of 'sale' does not take place without a seller and a buyer, unless the buyer purchases the product on sale. Communication also does not take place if there is ineffective communication, **inspite** of their being a sender, a message and a receiver. **Communication** involves interaction and is a continuous process in nursing as well as in management.

Let us now discuss the necessity of communication in nursing profession under following headlines.

1.2.2 Importance of Communication in Nursing

One of the distinct features of health care delivery system which makes it stand apart from all other kinds of organisations is that we deal with human beings. 95% of our professional time is spent in dealing with human beings, whether that is with the patient, patient's relative, colleagues, seniors, subordinates or somebody visiting our hospital or in the community setting. Unless we are able to deal with them effectively we fall in our purpose. There are many factors involved in effective dealing. Communicating effectively is one of the important factors among them. Same is the case with administration and management. It may be in directing, co-ordinating, controlling, personal management or any other field of administration.

Effective communication is essential not only from the patient's point of view of public dealing but is equally important for the purpose of efficient patient care. One of the important roles we perform while being in various positions, is to obtain information from our colleagues, subordinates and others about the patients and their conditions for example, a nurse on morning duty takes the charge from the night duty staff. In the process of taking charge she clarifies many statements made in relation to individual patients to ensure the completeness of communication received. This is essential to ensure efficient and quality nursing care **services**.

Besides working as information seekers we need to forward the essential information to our seniors. A good amount of routine information needs to be disseminated to all others who are concerned with it

Information about a patient's condition, treatment to be given, investigations performed etc., is required when the senior doctor comes on round. The nurse or doctor on duty has to obtain the information either from the records or from the previous person on duty. He/she has to forward the important information to the senior doctor and inform other members of the patient care team. All this requires a great amount of communication skills. You must have now realized that communication is a two way process as well as a multi-dimensional process.

The importance of communication can be summarized as follows:

Sl. No.	Communication In Administration	Sl. No.	Communication In Patient Care
1.	During recruitment process	1.	Informing conditions and diagnosis
2.	During orientation of novice nurses	2.	During investigation, treatment and nursing care
3.	During personal and group evaluation and subordinates	3.	Planning care
4.	During inservice education	4.	Reassuring patient and relatives
5.	During decision-making and	5.	Solving problems
6.	During coordination of work	6.	Providing health education
7.	During meeting higher authorities	7.	Discussing patient care with the members of health team

1.2.3 Purposes of Communication

Results are achieved in an organisation through the process of communication. If there is a proper system of communication in an organisation, there will not be any misunderstanding and confusion. Communication is needed not only by the managerial staff for discharging their duties efficiently, but also by the lowest employees to listen to the instructions of their supervisors and to perform their duties sincerely. Proper communication is needed at every step and serves several purposes. It provides:

- 1) information and understanding necessary for group work;
- 2) the attitudes necessary for motivation, co-operation and job satisfaction;
- 3) work satisfaction; and
- 4) assistance in decision-making because taking decisions needs informations.

A good communication system results in better patient-care and higher job satisfaction through better team-work.

1.2.4 Basic Attributes of Good Communication

Now you will learn basic attributes of good communication.

Some of the basic attributes of good communication include respect for other person, honesty and genuineness in interactions and warmth. Respect for client can be shown in the way you address them, the voice tone you use and how you initiate conversation. Respect must always be fundamental in one's communication. Let us see the process of communication.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Define communication.

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2) Importance of communication in Nursing administration are:

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3) Purposes of communication are:

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1.3 PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION

Now you will learn about process of communication. In this section you will also learn about elements of communication and modes of communication and steps in communication.

Communication between two or more persons involves a series of steps and **elements**. This is called communication process.

Lyles and Joiner (1986) define communication process as exchange of meaning between and among individuals through a shared system of symbols that have the same meaning for both sender and receiver of message.

1.3.1 Elements of Communication

We have broken the communication sequence into smaller parts; these are called elements of communication. For any communication basically we have to have six elements of communication and they are **communicator** or **sender, encoding, message, media, decoding** and **receiver**.

- 1) **Sender/Communicator/Source:** The individual who generates or sends the message is called source or the communicator. No communication takes place without the source (sender of information) and the receiver (consumer of information). The source and the receiver could be human being, animals or even non-living objects. For instance cardiac monitor in CCU which has been pre-set to a range of heart beat, the moment the heart beat of a person goes below the pre-set range it gives an alarm. This is also **communication**, here the machine is the source of communication to the person **taking** care of the individual under observation. Computer (a non-living machine) can be a source of information for people. In case of educational communication, the institutions are the sources and the learners are the receivers of information:
- 2) **Encoding:** **Encoding** is the process by which the sender's ideas are converted into the message through the use of suitable language. The process of transforming thoughts and ideas into symbols is called encoding. The symbols can be verbal or non-verbal for example the ward sister on being happy at her staff's excellent performance may appreciate her verbally or may simply pat at her back and give a generous smile. The idea behind both the kind of behaviour is the same.
- 3) **Message:** The encoded message is required to be transmitted appropriately, in written or verbal **form**.
- 4) **Media:** The media are the means of conveying the message. The medium could be a letter, telephone, face to face conversation or electronic gadgets. Choice of medium depends on the nature, importance and urgency of the message.
- 5) **Decoder/Receiver:** Decoding is the process by which the receiver interpret the message sent. The receiver perceive what the sender intended through the sensation of seeing, hearing, and feeling and then analysis of the information through

interpretation of what is thought to be seen, heard or felt. The receiver interprets the information according to her memories, emotional status, attitude, values, needs, expectations and desires. To ensure the correct decoding of the message, it is important to understand the receiver's familiarity with the symbol or the language to be used. More the familiarity greater the probability of successful communication.

- 6) **Feedback:** Feedback constitutes the information which the sender receives about the receiver's reaction to the message that has been generated. Feedback is effective when the two communicators are sensitive to each other's message and respond accordingly. Through feedback the sender comes to know whether the message has been correctly received and understood.

1.3.2 Modes of Communication

A message's clarity is greatly affected by mode of communication used. In general, the more direct the communication, the greater the probability that it will clear. The more people involved in filtering the communication, the greater the chance of distortion. The following major modes of communication are used most frequently. Detail explanation is given in Section 1.4.

- 1) Written Communication
- 2) Face-to-face Communication
- 3) Non-verbal Communication
- 4) Telephonic Communication
- 5) Communication through Internet
- 6) Communication through Media

There are various modes of communication. The notice boards, house magazine, suggestion scheme, meetings and conferences, hospital and departmental letters and personnel policy manuals are considered effective in hospitals. Here we will discuss the common modes which are used in the hospital:

- 1) **Notice Boards:** These can be an effective method of communication provided they are well located and attractive to look at. The most important thing is that notices should not be allowed to outlive their usefulness. So one person should be made responsible for putting up notices and for regularly removing those which have served their purpose.
- 2) **House Magazine:** The introduction of a house magazine is good for average sized hospital as the magazine can provide a platform for top administrator to communicate with his employees in informal and direct terms. The house magazine can be in the form of a news bulletin wherein news and notes of topical interest can be published and the other one may be in the form of proper magazine where articles, poems, research abstract and news all find a place.
- 3) **Meetings and Conference:** Meetings and conferences are widely used methods of communication. The truly-effective conference and meetings encourage two way communication and involve a group of people putting forth their ideas and experiences. Those meetings and conferences which do not allow free participation should be discouraged.
- 4) **Hospital and Departmental Letters:** Letters sent from the chief executive of the hospital or department head to employees are generally used in special circumstances, such as any change in hospital policy, salary scales, fringe benefits etc. Such letters should be addressed by name, instead of 'Sir' to an employee because letters addressed by name are more personal and therefore effective.
- 5) **Use of e-mail:** Electronic mail can be used as a mode of communication between interdepartmental, between institutions and between patients and health care team. This can be time saving, cost effective way to express communication.

1.3.3 Steps in Communication

Communication is a vital aspect of the management process. In fact the superior subordinate relation cannot thrive without effective and meaningful communication. Therefore, planning and meaningful communication is essential to produce the desired result. Let us now see the essential steps to be taken in the planning of communication:

- 1) **Know your objective:** What is that you intend to accomplish by this communication.
- 2) **Participation of other** in the decision to communicate the message.
- 3) **Transmission of the message:** That is what to communicate, to whom to communicate, when and how to communicate are to be decided upon prior to actual transmission of the message.
- 4) **Establish mutual interest,** empathy the ability to see the other person's point of view is a priceless ingredient of effective communication.
- 5) **Watch your timings:** This is critical to the effectiveness of the communication. It is important to decide who should receive the communication first.
- 6) **Major results:** Has the desired response occurred?

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) List the elements of communication.

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- 2) List the major modes of communication.

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- 3) Write the steps of communication.

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1.4 TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

There are various ways to classify the types of communication. The types are classified on the following basis:

- 1) Presence or absence of word code e.g. verbal and non-verbal communication.
- 2) Another category is according to the flow of information in an organisation e.g. downward, upward, horizontal, grapevine.
- 3) Number of persons involved in communication e.g. inter-personal communication, group communication, organisational communication, mass communication.

1.4.1 Verbal and Non-verbal Communication

Let us discuss each type of communication *in detail*,

Verbal Communication

In verbal **communication** the message is communicated using words. Communication over long distances is mostly done through words, either written or spoken. The examples of oral **communication** are face-to-face conversation, telephonic talk, meetings, conferences etc. Circulars, memoranda, letters, official notes, notices etc. are written communication. Now **the question** is: Which type of communication is better? The answer is that each one of these **has its own** advantages and disadvantages. The choice will depend upon various factors like degree of urgency for response, content of message, availability of alternatives, channels etc. For example let's study this situation. In routine, the procedure is to carry out any **treatment** order only after it has been given in writing by the doctor whereas in situations like **cardiopulmonary** arrest, orders are carried out on verbal instruction and get the **same** in writing later by the doctor. So the selection of means of communication would vary **from** situation to situation. Both written and oral communication have their **positive** and negative points. Let us examine them.

Advantages of Verbal Communication

- i) **Spoken** communication-is faster and involve less inputs, facilitates early response or action.
- ii) **In verbal** communication scope of seeking clarification is greater and less formal atmosphere.

Limitations of Verbal Communication

- i) In verbal communication messages are at a risk of being distorted non-verbal communication.

Non-verbal Communication

It is generally accepted that non-verbal messages are more truthful and expressive than the verbal ones. **Non-verbal** signals include proximity, posture, physical appearance, gestures and facial expressions. **and** direction of gaze.

- i) **Proximity** varies from situation to situation. In a party physical proximity in a limited space facilitates the process of getting to know each other.
- ii) **Posture** is the way an individual stands, provides clues. It is assumed that an individual **with** good posture is likely to succeed in work setting.
- iii) **Physical appearance** provides varied clues from culture to culture. On the basis of **the picture** the individual tends to make behavioural predictions people **e.g.** with **long** hands are forthright, fat people are lazy etc.
- iv) **Gesture and facial expressions** transmit emotions, attitudes and beliefs. Gestures may **reinforce** verbal signal as well as convey additional information. Facial expressions may indicate emotional states, understanding concentration and attention.
- v) **Direction of gaze** indicates something about the receiver of a message. Interaction between two, people starts with eye contact. Direct eye **contact** is longer for the receiver than for the transmitter of the message.

This category has covered all possible means of non-verbal communication. Both verbal and non-verbal **communication** have advantages and limitations. Let us see the advantages and limitations of non-verbal communication.

Advantages of Non-verbal Communication

- i) In non-verbal communication messages are more precise and **definite** and can be verified.
- ii) **Written communication** makes the delivery more formal and create a feeling of being bound.

Limitations

- i) Non-verbal communication message suffers from the disadvantage
 - a) It is slower method and involves lots of paper work and inputs in terms of manpower, money, material and machine.

The communication skill is not only to recognise the verbal and non-verbal messages but also to learn to use non-verbal language. Care should be taken to ensure that our non-verbal communication should not contradict our verbal message.

1.4.2 Formal and Informal Flow of Communication

In every health care organisation there are four basic communication flows through which messages can be passed downward, upward, horizontal, and grapevine. Let us examine the channel of communication.

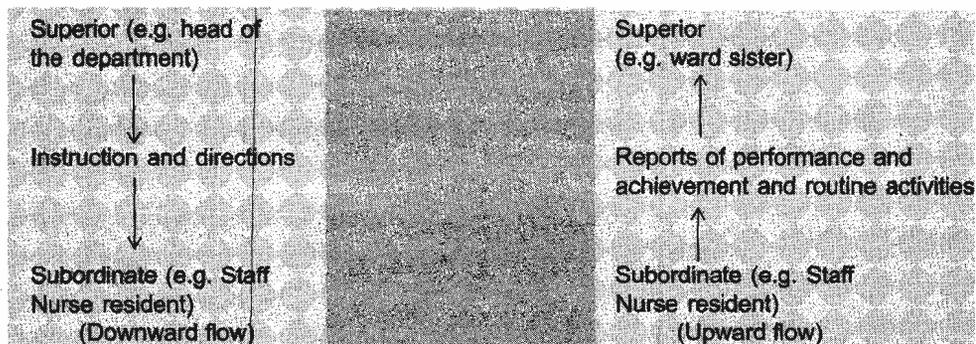
Formal Communication Channel: (a) downward; (b) upward; (c) horizontal;

Informal Communication Channel: (grapevine)

- a) **Downward Communication:** This means the dissemination of information from superiors to the immediate subordinates in the form of orders and directions. In downward authority flows downwards. Different organisations adopt different methods to convey downward communication in the form of circulars, notice boards, posters, house magazine, face to face conversations, etc.
- b) **Upward Communication:** This is the passing of information from the employee levels to administration. The most common purpose of this information flow is to relay feedback and how well things are going. Upward communication mainly from staff nurse to ward sister and upward, specially reports of performance and achievements and routine activities to be communicated.
- c) **Horizontal Communication:** This means the flow of communication amongst personnel at the same level of the hierarchy in an organisation. The most common purpose of this communication flow is to promote job coordination or teamwork. For example if the head dietician needs to discuss a matter with the housekeeping supervisor, it is much easier to contact this individual via a lateral communication instead of contacting him through administrator.
- d) **Grapevine:** Grapevine communication may be formal or informal. Formal communication consists of **officially-recognized** methods such as departmental meetings, conferences, news bulletin, etc. Informal communication consists of a complex network of informal man-to-man personal contacts which take place on the job. Any informal communication about **official** matters constitutes the grapevine. Informal communication is not only fast and spontaneous but also enjoys a high degree of credibility amongst the employees.

Information flows through social contacts among employees which has no official control. The message spreads in all directions to all levels. It is generally seen that the content of informal communication refer to either the problem relating to work and existing practices. Philips (1975) has explained how information channel operate in the following ways in informal communication.

We can summarize these directions of formal flow of information as given below:



Department

Department

No. of patients
to be operated

Surgery _____ Operation Theatre

Number of people involved in communication

Communication can be discussed at four levels, these are:

- Interpersonal communication
- Group communication
- Organisational communication
- Mass communication

- i) **Interpersonal Communication:** Interpersonal communication includes conversation between two persons. This is a common type of communication, in which two persons share their feelings, emotions, thoughts, ideas; etc. Interaction between employer and employee, patient and the nurse are a few examples of interpersonal communication. Talking on the telephone to someone is yet another example of interpersonal communication.
- ii) **Group Communication:** In this type of communication the members of a group interact with each other. A group is collectively of people who have common interest. Discussion in a workshop, a seminar or a family are examples of group communication. It is used to take a collective decision on a problem, an issue or a matter of common concern. The participants involved in a group communication take active part in communication to achieve a set of goals or to find the solution to a problem faced by the group. Group communication is presented diagrammatically.
- iii) **Organisational Communication:** It is that communication which revolves around the organisation. Since any organisation consists of groups of individuals, it can be said to be multiple group communication system having interaction among each other. Communication may start from any point in the organisation, but the immediate way of the information is only within the organisation.

Examples of this type of communication are schools, industries, offices etc. Notifications are normally used as means of communication in such organisational communication system.

- iv) **Mass Communication:** Mass communication involves more than two persons but it is beyond group and organisational communication. As the term 'mass' indicates, this type of communication always concerns a large number of people sharing information, ideas, thoughts, etc. In this case we use the mass media to communicate with a large number of people. In mass communication we include face-to-face, as well as, print and non-print communication. For example, the radio and television programmes are broadcast to educate, inform or entertain a large number of people. The mass communication has a large audience and they are heterogeneous. Let us see what are the channels of communication through which the information flows in an organisation.

1.5 CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

Now let us discuss channels of communication. As a nurse you must know different channels of communication.

Communication media can use formal and informal channel. When one communicates through formal channel the message travels up and down the hierarchy from superior to subordinate. Sometimes horizontal communication is employed but it follows a formal route. Formal and Informal channels of communication are already discussed under sub-section 1.4.2.

Communication Network

Having a definite, well designed structure of channel of communication is absolutely essential for any organisation. These channels will not only ensure correct and orderly flow of information but will also supply the required information to various concerned departments for their smooth functioning. There are various ways in which these channels can be designed. The three basic communication networks are wheel, chain; circle.

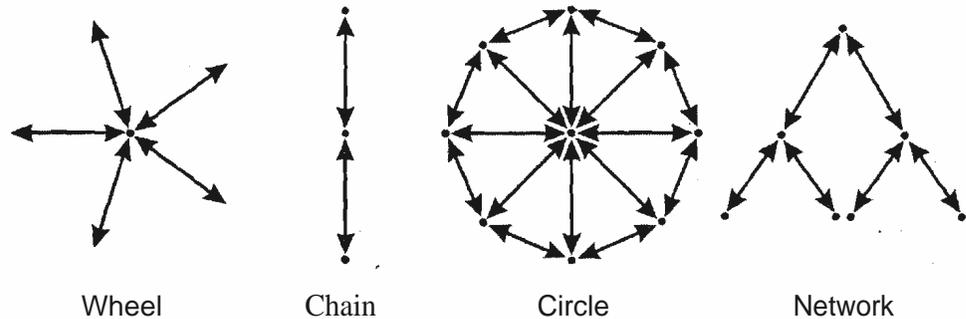


Fig. 1.1: Various Communication Networks

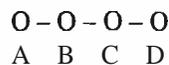
- i) **Wheel Chain:** In this pattern, each member can communicate to the superior but to no other members. All information exchange is with the central members who make the decisions and send information back. For example, for any problem each head of the department discusses with medical superintendent but not with each other. (Fig 1.2)
- ii) **Chain Network:** In this network, communication takes place only upward and downward. In this network two persons serve as communicators and persons have only the other person with whom they can communicate directly. Refer Single Stand Chain.
- iii) **Circle Network:** This network provides equal communication opportunities for every member. In such a situation communication can take place between superior and subordinate with cross communication with the other members.

Wheel and chain network are more effective in terms of speed and accuracy of performance.

The design of the channel selected for any organisation can affect the level of quality of **performance** and speed of result. We also have to remember that these formal channels of communication can affect the satisfaction of the group members. Each network has its strong and weak points and accordingly their suitability also differs.

Direction of flow of informal communication (Grapevine)

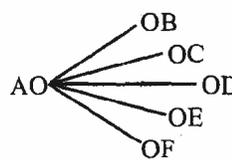
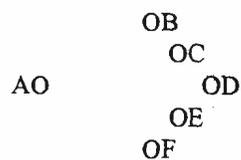
- 1) The Single Strand Chain



ABCD —

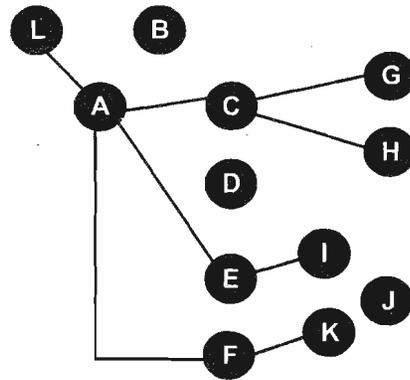
A tells B who tells C who tells D and so on.

- 2) The Gossip Chain



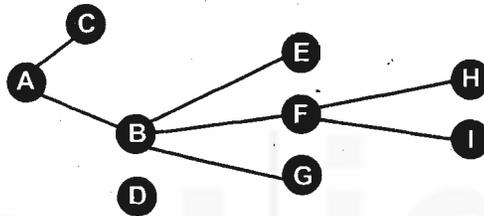
Where one person tells everyone

3) The probability chain



A communicates randomly to C, E, F and L and who further tell to G, H, I, K randomly, in accordance with the law of probability.

4) The Cluster Chain



A tells two selected others and one of them tells three others and may be only one of these tells to the other selected two. This is how the informal communication takes place.

In practice, one has to use numerous channels of communication. A successful system of communication must operate not only from the Chief Executive's office downwards but must consist of four interlocking circuits transmitting information, opinions, etc. downward, upward, horizontal and grapevine.

On account of pressure of work, management cannot communicate everything to all employees every time. The crucial factor from management's point of view is to communicate an **understanding** of those things that will enable **employees** to do their best at their work. This means, explaining fully what the job comprises of **e.g.**, duties, responsibilities, relation to other jobs, etc. The conditions of employment relating to a job must be made clear, **e.g.** salary, working hours, provision for training and promotion. Management must provide the information every employee needs to know in order to carry out his particular job. Constructive criticism by the senior manager of his subordinate's performance is also very necessary. Communication in the reverse direction **i.e.**, feedback from the employees, is necessary if management is to control the organisation. The feedback should amount to an assessment of reaction to the instructions given or decisions taken. If the relations are cordial, there may be numerous suggestions made by subordinates as to how their department's efficiency can be improved.

Check Your Progress 3

1) Advantages of verbal communication are:

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2) Formal communication channels are:

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3) Describe the channel of communication in your organisation using diagram.

1.6 LET US SUM UP

A proper understanding of information is one very important aspect of communication. If the information is not understood by the receiver in the same meaning in which its sender wants him to understand it. Communication is not merely transmission of information from one person to another but also correct interpretation and understanding of information. It is not to get something off the mind of the person transmitting it, but to get something into the mind and actions of the person receiving it.

1.7 KEY WORDS

- Communication** : The process of transmitting such as thoughts, ideas, facts, through the use of languages and symbols, from one person to another.
- Communication Barriers** : These are the elements that interfere with effective communication.
- Communication Channels** : Is the line or structure which provides the direction for the flow of information.
- Communication Process** : It is the series of elements and actions which are inter-connected for any communication to take place.
- Grapevine** : This is an informal communication channel, where the gossip chain operates mostly.

1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Communication is the art of being able to structure and transmit a message in a way that another person can easily understand or accept.
- 2)
 - It is important in view of public dealing, patient care, planning of care, in problem solving, educating patient etc.
 - It is important in view of administration, recruitment, meeting, educating.
- 3) Purposes of communication are:
 - Providing information
 - Communicating ideas, treatment, plan etc.
 - Educating patients, subordinate, co-worker etc.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Elements of communication are:
 - Sender
 - Encoding
 - Message
 - Media
 - Decoder
 - Feedback

2) Major modes of communication are:

- Verbal
- Non-verbal

3) Steps of communication are:

- Stating objectives
- Participating in planning
- Transmission of message
- Establish mutual interest
- Time management
- Major result

Check Your Progress 3

1) Advantages of verbal communication are :

- Faster and early response
- Seeking clarification in time

2) Formal communication channels are:

- Downwards
- Upwards
- Horizontal

3) Write your own answer.