

Chapter 32

Informational, Physical, and Psychological Privacy as Determinants of Patient Behaviour in Health Care

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents and describes a theoretical framework explicating how three dimensions of privacy in healthcare (i.e. informational, physical, and psychological) influence patient behaviour through trust. Informational privacy is defined as the patients' perceptions of the degree of control over their personal information when their doctor collects, uses, disseminates, and stores their information. Physical privacy refers to the patients' perceptions of the degree of their physical inaccessibility to others. Psychological privacy is the patients' perceptions of the extent to which the physician allows them to participate in their healthcare decisions and maintains their personal and cultural values, such as inner thoughts, feelings, cultural beliefs, and religious practices. These types of privacy are especially important with respect to service quality and patient safety due to the recent advancements in information and telecommunication technologies and the availability of online medical information. As a result, patients have become more educated in various health issues, and many of them want to actively participate in their health decisions. The framework proposes that these privacy dimensions affect trust in a healthcare provider. Trust, in turn, has an effect on treatment compliance, positive word-of-mouth, and commitment to stay with the current service provider in the future. Based on the framework, recommendations for healthcare stakeholders are provided.

INTRODUCTION AND PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

Health care service quality and patient safety are important factors that have received much attention in both academic and practitioner literature. The key reason is that they influence a number of critical

outcomes that are of interest to health care scholars, service providers, policy makers and patients. The patients' perceptions of privacy are one of the most salient components of health care service quality and patient safety. The reason is that privacy directly influences perceptions of trust in the service provider, which in turn affects patient behaviour.

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This chapter presents and describes a theoretical framework explicating how three dimensions of privacy in health care, i.e. informational, physical, and psychological, influence patient behaviour through trust. Privacy perceptions are considered a functional part in the evaluation of health service quality, with the patients' perceptions of privacy being critical because they directly and indirectly affect the various aspects of people's health care experience.

Informational privacy is the patients' perceptions of the degree of control over their personal information when their provider collects, uses, disseminates and stores this information. Physical privacy refers to the patients' perceptions of the degree of their physical inaccessibility to others. Psychological privacy is the patients' perceptions of the extent to which their provider allows them to participate in their health care decisions, and maintain their personal and cultural values; such as inner thoughts, feelings, cultural beliefs and religious practices. These types of privacy are important for two reasons. First, the recent advancements in information and telecommunication technologies allow health care providers to collect, store and disseminate personal information. Second, given the availability of online medical information, patients have become well educated, they expect their providers to behave in a specific

way, and they want to participate in all decisions concerning their health.

The proposed framework (see Figure 1) explicates the influence of privacy dimensions discussed above on patients' trust in their service provider, which in turn affects their behaviours, such as treatment adherence, word-of-mouth and commitment to use the services of this provider in the future.

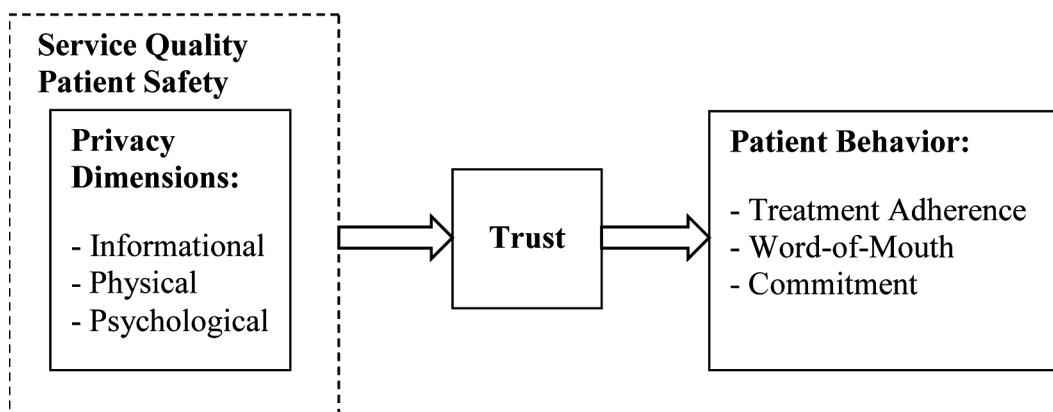
The rest of this chapter is structured as follows. The next section discusses the impact of information technologies (IT) on service quality and patient safety. This is followed by a detailed description of informational, physical and psychological privacy dimensions. After this, trust in health care providers and its impact on patient behaviour are discussed. In the concluding part, several implications and recommendations are offered.

SERVICE QUALITY AND PATIENT SAFETY

The Role of Information Technologies

The health information technology sector brings an untapped potential to improve the quality of health care. Information technology promotes

Figure 1. Influence of privacy dimensions on patients' trust and patient behaviour



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