

## A Cross-Sectional Study Assessing Communication Practices among Doctors at a University Hospital in Pakistan

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**Abstract :** Communication among health care givers is the essence of quality patient care and any compromise results in errors and inefficiency leading to cumbersome outcomes. The use of smartphone among health professionals has increased tremendously. Almost every health professional carries it and majority of them uses a third party communication software called whatsapp for work related communications. It gives instant access to the person responsible for any particular query and therefore helps in efficient and timely decision making. It is also an easy way of sharing medical documents, multimedia and provides platform for consensual decision making through group discussions. However clinical communication through whatsapp has some demerits too including reduction in verbal communication, worsening professional relations, unprofessional behavior, risk of confidentiality breach and threats from cyber-attacks. On the other hand the traditional pager device being used in many health care systems is a unidirectional communication that lacks the ability to convey any information other than the number to which the receiver has to respond. Our study focused on these two widely used modalities of communication among doctors of the largest tertiary care center of Pakistan i.e. The Aga Khan University Hospital. Our aim was to note which modality is considered better and has fewer threats to medical data. Approval from ethical review committee of the institute was taken prior to conduction of this study. We submitted an online survey form to all the interns and residents working at our institute and collected their response in a month's time. 162 submissions were recorded and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Only 20% of them were comfortable with using pagers exclusively, 52% with whatsapp and 28% with both. 65% think that whatsapp is time-saving and quicker than pager. 54% of them considered whatsapp to be causing nuisance from work related notifications in their off-work hours. 60% think that they are more likely to miss information through pager system because of the unidirectional nature. Almost all (96%) of residents and interns found whatsapp to be useful in terms of saving information for future reference. For urgent issues, majority (70%) preferred pager over whatsapp and also pager was considered more valid in terms of hospital policies and legal issues. Among major advantages of whatsapp as listed by them were; easy mass communication, sharing of clinical pictures, universal access and no need of carrying additional device. However the major drawback of using whatsapp for clinical communication that everyone shared was threat to patients' confidentiality as clinicians usually share pictures of wounds, clinical documents etc. Lastly we asked them if they think there is a need of a separate application for instant communication dedicated to clinical communication only and 90% responded positively. Therefore, we concluded that both modalities have their merits and demerits but the greatest drawback with whatsapp is the risk of breach in patients' confidentiality and off-work disturbance. Hence, we recommend a more secure, institute-run application for all intra hospital communications where they can share documents, pictures etc. easily under a controlled environment.

**Keywords :** WhatsApp, pager, clinical communication, confidentiality

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