

Abstract

The communication between patient and healthcare professional is one of the keys to patients' adherence to treatment and to successful therapy; hence communication is a relevant and widely discussed issue of our healthcare. The relationship between a patient and a health worker is rather asymmetric, which affects the course of their communication. This asymmetry is based on the patient made weak (helpless) by illness whereas the expert/physician is in the position to prescribe treatment with the health staff administering such treatment. The aim of the study is to explore the extent of asymmetry in Czech hospitals, the situations where it is most pronounced and the changing structure of asymmetry as seen from the patients' point of view. We conducted a qualitative analysis of 16 interviews with respondents who have experienced hospitalization. The analysis focuses on the psychological level of communication and on the dynamic process in which the asymmetry is being negotiated. We have proved that there is an a priori asymmetry in the relationship, which, under certain circumstances, is effective for the treatment. The asymmetry is being continually negotiated throughout the communication as it fluctuates within four areas: (1) providing information, (2) rules and practices of the hospital, (3) closing the person in hospital and (4) the way the person's body is treated. Interpersonal dynamics has the same importance for the nature of asymmetry: the patient's self-definition can be either confirmed, rejected or disconfirmed; the decisive factor is whether the health worker is able to reflect the patient's personal perspective, or not. Hospitalization can also be an impulse to reflect or redefine a person's identity. Knowing patients' experience can provide insight into asymmetric relations in healthcare, so it can become the basis for teaching healthcare professionals.