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Original Research Article

An In-Depth Exploration of Strategies Aimed at Identifying and Effectively Resolving Conflicts Between Patients and Health Care Providers in Obstetrics Department

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Abstract:

Background: Conflict is an inevitable aspect of professional life, particularly in healthcare, where interactions between patients, their families, healthcare providers, and administrators are frequent and sometimes emotionally charged.

Aim: To conduct an in-depth exploration of strategies aimed at identifying and effectively resolving conflicts between patients and healthcare providers in the Obstetrics and Gynecology Department.

Material & Methods: A Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP) study was conducted at the SMGS Hospital, Jammu, over a three-month period from July 1, 2024, to October 1, 2024. The study involved 200 participants in total, 100 inpatients (both antenatal and postnatal patients) and 100 healthcare professionals, including obstetricians, midwives, nurses, and administrative staff. Data collection was primarily qualitative, employing semi-structured interviews to capture detailed insights into conflict dynamics.

Results: Conflicts among healthcare professionals were frequently reported, with 83 out of 100 respondents experiencing them, primarily during day shifts. Miscommunication was identified as the leading cause (29.19%), followed by verbal abuse (22.16%). High-stress environments, such as labor and delivery and emergency departments, were the most affected, with key triggers including inadequate management support, insufficient resources, and high patient volumes. While the majority perceived intra-department communication as effective, coordination challenges between different roles persisted. Addressing these conflicts requires a multifaceted approach, including improved communication (29.19%), team-building initiatives, and administrative support to alleviate resource shortages and workload pressures.

Conclusion: Conflicts in healthcare, especially in high-pressure settings like obstetrics and gynecology, requires urgent attention. Effective communication, management support, and structured training programs can help mitigate these issues. Prioritizing safe reporting mechanisms and fostering a culture of respect can enhance teamwork and reduce burnout. Future research should assess the long-term impact of conflict resolution strategies on patient care and staff retention.

Keywords: Conflict resolution, healthcare conflicts, obstetrics and gynecology, patient-provider conflict, miscommunication, verbal abuse, high-stress environments, teamwork, administrative support, resource shortages, healthcare management.

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Introduction

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of professional life, particularly in healthcare, where interactions between patients, their families, healthcare providers, and administrators are frequent and sometimes emotionally charged. Conflicts between doctors and patients can arise from misunderstandings, unmet expectations, or dissatisfaction with care. In India, violence against doctors has alarmingly increased by 75%, and by 2015, 75% of Indian doctors had experienced workplace violence. Similarly, in Japan, a 2003 report revealed that 60% of people were dissatisfied with their healthcare professionals. In the UK, a survey of General Practitioners (GPs) found that over 60% had faced abuse or violence by patients or their families, with nearly 20% reporting such

incidents at least once a month. In India, 87% of violent incidents towards doctors are verbal, while 8.4% are physical.

Conflicts between doctors and patients can arise from various factors, including misunderstandings, unmet expectations, dissatisfaction with the care provided, and cultural or communication barriers. In India, for instance, there has been a significant rise in violence against doctors, with an alarming 75% increase by 2015. Statistics indicate that 75% of Indian doctors had experienced workplace violence, and a large proportion of these incidents involved verbal aggression (87%), with 8.4% escalating to physical violence. Similarly, international trends reflect similar concerns. A 2003 report from Japan indicated that 60% of individuals were dissatisfied with their healthcare professionals. In the UK, over 60% of General Practitioners (GPs) reported experiencing verbal abuse or violence from patients or their families, with 20% stating that such incidents occurred at least once a month.

These conflicts, if left unresolved, can have serious consequences. Not only do they affect the quality of care provided to patients, but they also have a profound impact on the mental and emotional well-being of healthcare providers. Effectively addressing these conflicts is essential to ensuring the safety of medical care, promoting a culture of respect in the workplace, and improving overall communication and collaboration among healthcare teams.

In obstetrics departments, conflicts take on a unique sensitivity due to the emotional and physical complexities of pregnancy and childbirth. The high-stress environment, combined with life-altering decisions and the physical vulnerability of patients, makes conflict management in obstetrics particularly crucial. Common sources of conflict in these settings include miscommunication, power imbalances, ethical dilemmas, adverse outcomes, financial concerns, and emotional factors such as fear and anxiety.

Effectively addressing these conflicts is crucial for ensuring the safety of medical care, promoting a culture of respect in the workplace, and improving team communication. Mismanaged conflicts can significantly affect healthcare providers' well-being, productivity, and job satisfaction, while also impairing the quality of patient care. In obstetrics departments, conflicts are particularly sensitive due to the emotional complexities of pregnancy and childbirth. Common sources of conflict in obstetrics include miscommunication, power imbalances, ethical dilemmas, adverse patient outcomes, financial concerns, and emotional factors such as fear and anxiety.

Impact of Conflicts

- **On Patients**: Conflicts may lead to increased stress, delayed treatment, worsened health outcomes, and mistrust of the healthcare system.
- **On Healthcare Professionals**: Burnout, job dissatisfaction, decreased performance, and even legal or reputational damage may result from unresolved conflicts.
- **On Healthcare Systems**: Conflicts can increase costs, decrease efficiency, reduce patient satisfaction, and erode public trust in the system.

Strategies for Addressing Conflicts

- **Negotiation**: Direct communication between parties to reach a mutually agreeable solution, often with a focus on empathy, compassion, and shared decision-making.
- **Mediation**: Involves a neutral third party who facilitates communication and helps find solutions.
- **Arbitration**: A binding decision made by a third party to resolve the conflict.
- **Legal Action**: In extreme cases, legal remedies such as filing a lawsuit may be pursued.

Aim: To conduct an in-depth exploration of strategies aimed at identifying and effectively resolving conflicts between patients and healthcare providers in the Obstetrics and Gynecology Department.

Objectives

1. To identify the origins of conflicts in the Obstetrics and Gynecology Department.
2. To analyze the factors responsible for conflicts.
3. To explore conflict patterns in the department.
4. To suggest possible solutions for conflict management.
5. To recommend measures for conflict resolution in the department.

Study Location: The study was conducted at the SMGS Hospital, Jammu, an urban public hospital with a busy obstetrics and gynecology department.

Study Period: The study took place over a three-month period from July 1, 2024, to October 1, 2024.

Population: The study involved 200 participants in total, with an equal split between patients and healthcare professionals:

- 100 inpatients (both antenatal and postnatal patients).

- 100 healthcare professionals, including obstetricians, midwives, nurses, and administrative staff.

Study Design: A Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP) study was conducted to explore both patients' and healthcare providers' perceptions and experiences of conflict. Data collection was primarily qualitative, employing semi-structured interviews to capture detailed insights into conflict dynamics.

Sampling Method: Convenience sampling was used to select participants, ensuring that both patients and healthcare professionals who were available and willing to participate during the study period were included. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent and data confidentiality, were strictly adhered to.

Data Collection: A specially designed questionnaire was used to collect data from both patients and healthcare professionals. The questionnaire was available in multiple languages to cater to the linguistic preferences of participants. It consisted of both open-ended and closed-ended questions to elicit comprehensive responses.

The questionnaire underwent a review process by four medical professionals, who provided feedback on the clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness of the questions. After their approval, the finalized version was used to gather data during the study period.

This structure forms the foundation for a detailed and comprehensive exploration of conflict identification and resolution in the obstetrics department. The subsequent chapters would include the presentation of results, discussion of findings, and the formulation of recommendations for conflict management in such high-stakes healthcare environments.

Results

Among the 100 healthcare professionals surveyed, conflicts were a frequent occurrence, especially duringt inpatient emergency services. About 83 respondents reported experiencing conflicts, mostly during day shifts, with common triggers including inadequate support from management, insufficient resources, and high patient volumes. Miscommunication (29.19%) was the leading cause of conflict, followed by verbal abuse (22.16%). Only a small proportion reported physical abuse or authority-based conflicts.

Communication within the department was perceived as effective by a majority of respondents, though there were challenges in coordination between different roles. Most conflicts arose in high-stress areas, such as labor and delivery or emergency departments, where patient care urgency often exacerbated tensions.

Addressing these conflicts requires a multipronged approach, including better communication, team-building efforts, and administrative support to reduce resource shortages and patient overload.

Among the 100 healthcare professionals surveyed, conflicts were frequently reported, particularly during inpatient emergency services. Notably, 83 respondents indicated experiencing conflicts, primarily during day shifts. Common triggers included inadequate support from management, insufficient resources, and high patient volumes.

Table 1: Frequency of Conflicts Among Healthcare Professionals

Conflict Type	Frequency (%)	Amount (Number)
Miscommunication	29.19%	24
Verbal Abuse	22.16%	18
Physical Abuse	5%	4
Authority-based Conflicts	3.61%	3

Interpretation

The data in the table illustrates the types of conflicts encountered by healthcare professionals, emphasizing the prevalence of different conflict scenarios in their workplace:

1. **Miscommunication (29.19%, n=24)**: Miscommunication emerged as the most frequent source of conflict among respondents, highlighting a critical area for improvement in communication practices within healthcare settings. This suggests that misunderstandings can significantly disrupt team dynamics and patient care, warranting targeted interventions to enhance clarity and information exchange among team members.
2. **Verbal Abuse (22.16%, n=18)**: Verbal abuse was reported by a substantial portion of respondents, indicating that confrontational interactions may be commonplace in high-stress healthcare environments. This type of conflict can create a hostile work atmosphere, adversely affecting staff morale and collaboration. Efforts to implement training on conflict resolution and communication strategies could mitigate such behaviors.
3. **Physical Abuse (5%, n=4)**: Although less common, the presence of physical abuse should

not be overlooked. The occurrence of physical confrontations, albeit limited, points to the necessity for safety protocols and support systems to protect healthcare workers and ensure a safe working environment.

4. **Authority-based Conflicts (3.61%, n=3)**: Authority-based conflicts were the least reported type, suggesting that issues related to hierarchical structures may be less prevalent. However, even a small number of such conflicts can indicate potential concerns regarding power dynamics and decision-making processes within healthcare teams.

Table 2: Common Triggers of Conflicts

Trigger	Frequency (%)	Amount (Number)
Inadequate Management Support	35%	29
Insufficient Resources	40%	33
High Patient Volumes	25%	21

Interpretation

The data presented in the table outlines the various triggers that contribute to conflicts experienced by healthcare professionals in their work environment. Each trigger reflects underlying systemic issues that can lead to tension and conflict among staff.

1. **Inadequate Management Support (35%, n=29)**: A significant proportion of respondents (35%) reported inadequate management support as a trigger for conflict. This suggests that healthcare professionals often feel unsupported in their roles, which can lead to frustration and increased conflict. Enhancing managerial support through regular feedback, training, and open communication could help mitigate this issue.
2. **Insufficient Resources (40%, n=33)**: The highest frequency of conflict triggers stems from insufficient resources, reported by 40% of respondents. This indicates a critical area where healthcare institutions may be falling short, as a lack of resources can directly impact the quality of care provided and increase stress among staff. Addressing this issue through better resource allocation and management could significantly reduce the occurrence of conflicts.
3. **High Patient Volumes (25%, n=21)**: High patient volumes were identified by 25% of respondents as a trigger for conflict. This finding reflects the pressures faced by healthcare professionals, particularly in high-demand settings like emergency departments and labor and delivery. Implementing strategies to manage patient flow more effectively and ensuring adequate staffing levels can alleviate some of the stress associated with high patient volumes.

Table 3: Conflicts by Shift Timing

Shift Type	Number of Conflicts	Percentage (%)	Amount (Number)
Day Shift	60	72.29%	60
Night Shift	23	27.71%	23

Interpretation

The data in the table summarizes the occurrence of conflicts among healthcare professionals based on their shift types, revealing significant differences between day and night shifts.

1. **Day Shift (72.29%, n=60)**: The majority of conflicts (72.29%) occurred during the day shift, indicating that this time period is particularly fraught with challenges. The higher incidence of conflicts during the day may be attributed to various factors, including increased patient volumes, more staff interactions, and heightened demands from both patients and management. This suggests a pressing need for improved communication strategies and conflict resolution training for day shift personnel to effectively manage and mitigate conflicts.
2. **Night Shift (27.71%, n=23)**: Conflicts during the night shift were significantly lower at 27.71%. While this may suggest that the night shift is relatively calmer, it could also reflect fewer staff interactions and lower patient volumes during these hours. Nonetheless, the presence of conflicts during the night shift still necessitates attention, particularly as issues may remain unaddressed due to reduced staffing and support.

Table 4: Perception of Communication Effectiveness

Communication Aspect	Effective (%)	Ineffective (%)	Amount (Number)
Within Department	75%	25%	Effective: 75
Between Different Roles	45%	55%	Effective: 45

Interpretation

The data in the table evaluates the effectiveness of communication within healthcare settings, focusing on two distinct aspects: communication within departments and between different roles.

1. **Within Department (Effective: 75%)**: A notable 75% of respondents reported effective communication within their department. This indicates that the majority of healthcare professionals feel comfortable and supported when interacting with their colleagues in the same department. Effective internal communication likely contributes to smoother operations, better teamwork, and enhanced patient care. However, the remaining 25% who perceive communication as ineffective highlight the need for continued efforts to address any existing barriers or misunderstandings within the department.
2. **Between Different Roles (Effective: 45%)**: In contrast, only 45% of respondents viewed communication between different roles as effective, while 55% considered it ineffective. This significant disparity points to potential challenges in collaboration across various positions and departments, which can hinder overall team performance and patient outcomes. Poor communication between different roles can lead to misunderstandings, duplication of efforts, and a lack of coordination, particularly in high-stress environments. Addressing these issues through interdisciplinary training and fostering an environment that encourages open dialogue could improve communication effectiveness across different roles.

Table 5: Locations of Conflict Occurrence

Location	Frequency (%)	Amount (Number)
Labor and Delivery	40%	33
Emergency Department	35%	29
General Ward	15%	12
Outpatient Services	10%	8

Interpretation

The data presented in the table illustrates the distribution of conflicts among healthcare professionals across different locations within a healthcare facility. Each location has varying frequencies of conflict, suggesting different underlying dynamics and pressures.

1. **Labor and Delivery (40%, n=33)**: The highest frequency of conflicts (40%) occurred in the Labor and Delivery unit. This can be attributed to the high-stress nature of the environment, where urgency, emotional factors, and critical decision-making are prevalent. The significant occurrence of conflicts in this area underscores the need for effective communication, support systems, and conflict resolution strategies to ensure that both staff and patients feel safe and supported during a pivotal time in care.
2. **Emergency Department (35%, n=29)**: Conflicts in the Emergency Department were also notable, comprising 35% of reported incidents. Similar to Labor and Delivery, the fast-paced and unpredictable nature of emergency care often leads to heightened tensions. Addressing conflicts in this location is essential to maintain patient safety and team collaboration, as the stakes are particularly high in emergency situations.
3. **General Ward (15%, n=12)**: Conflicts in the General Ward were less frequent at 15%. While this is lower compared to the previous two locations, it still indicates that issues can arise, potentially related to patient care pressures, staffing challenges, or resource limitations. Continued monitoring and support in this area can help prevent escalation of conflicts.
4. **Outpatient Services (10%, n=8)**: The lowest frequency of conflicts was reported in Outpatient Services at 10%. The relatively calm environment in outpatient settings may contribute to fewer conflicts. However, this does not diminish the importance of ongoing communication and support in this area, as misunderstandings can still occur, affecting the overall patient experience.

Table 6: Impact of Conflicts on Job Satisfaction

Impact on Job Satisfaction	Frequency (%)	Amount (Number)
Decreased Satisfaction	50%	42
No Impact	30%	25
Increased Stress	20%	16

Interpretation

The data in the table reveals the various impacts of conflicts experienced by healthcare professionals on their job satisfaction, reflecting significant trends that warrant attention from management and organizational leaders.

1. **Decreased Satisfaction (50%, n=42)**: Half of the respondents (50%) reported that conflicts led to decreased job satisfaction. This is a concerning statistic, as decreased satisfaction can affect staff morale, retention rates, and overall workplace culture. Addressing the sources of conflict and implementing effective conflict resolution strategies could help enhance job satisfaction and foster a more positive work environment.
2. **No Impact (30%, n=25)**: A notable 30% of respondents indicated that conflicts had no impact on their job satisfaction. This group may possess coping mechanisms or strong support systems that allow them to navigate conflicts without significant detriment to their job satisfaction. However, this does not negate the importance of improving workplace conditions for those who do feel the negative effects of conflicts.
3. **Increased Stress (20%, n=16)**: Twenty percent of respondents experienced increased stress as a result of conflicts. While this percentage is lower than those reporting decreased satisfaction, it highlights an important aspect of workplace dynamics. Increased stress can lead to burnout and can adversely affect patient care and staff interactions. Organizations should consider stress management initiatives and resources to support staff dealing with the pressures associated with conflict.

Table 7: Suggested Strategies to Reduce Conflicts

Strategy	Frequency (%)	Amount (Number)
Improved Communication	60%	50
Team-Building Activities	25%	21
Increased Management Support	10%	8
Enhanced Training	5%	4

Interpretation

The data in the table outlines the strategies that healthcare professionals believe would be effective in addressing conflicts within their work environment. The responses highlight different levels of preference for various approaches:

1. **Improved Communication (60%, n=50)**: The most favored strategy, supported by 60% of respondents, is improved communication. This indicates a strong recognition among healthcare professionals of the critical role effective communication plays in preventing and resolving conflicts. Enhancing communication channels, establishing regular team meetings, and promoting open dialogue could significantly reduce misunderstandings and foster a more collaborative work environment.
2. **Team-Building Activities (25%, n=21)**: A quarter of respondents (25%) advocated for team-building activities as a way to mitigate conflicts. Such activities can strengthen relationships among team members, improve trust, and enhance collaboration. Implementing regular team-building initiatives could help create a more cohesive team dynamic, thereby reducing the likelihood of conflicts arising in high-pressure situations.
3. **Increased Management Support (10%, n=8)**: Only 10% of respondents suggested increased management support as a key strategy. This indicates that while management support is important, healthcare professionals may feel that the existing level of support is sufficient or that communication and teamwork are more pressing issues. However, ensuring management is visibly supportive and available for conflict resolution can still play a vital role in creating a positive work environment.
1. 4. **Enhanced Training (5%, n=4)**: The least favored strategy was enhanced training, supported by only 5% of respondents. This could imply that while training is recognized as valuable, healthcare professionals might prioritize immediate communication and team dynamics over formal training programs. Nevertheless, targeted training in conflict resolution, communication skills, and stress management could still provide long-term benefits.

Table 8: Frequency of Conflicts Based on Experience Level

Experience Level	Number of Conflicts	Percentage (%)	Amount (Number)
0-5 Years	15	18.07%	15
6-10 Years	30	36.14%	30
11+ Years	38	45.78%	38

Interpretation

The data in the table highlights the distribution of conflicts among healthcare professionals based on their experience levels, revealing important trends that could inform conflict management strategies within healthcare settings.

1. **0-5 Years (18.07%, n=15)**: The lowest number of conflicts was reported among healthcare professionals with 0-5 years of experience, accounting for 18.07% of total conflicts. This suggests that relatively less experienced staff may either be less exposed to conflict situations or may not engage in conflicts as readily as their more seasoned colleagues. However, it may also reflect a lack of familiarity with the high-stress environment, which could mean that as they gain experience, their exposure to conflicts might increase.
2. **6-10 Years (36.14%, n=30)**: Healthcare professionals with 6-10 years of experience reported a moderate level of conflicts, making up 36.14% of the total. This group may be facing challenges as they transition into more complex roles and responsibilities, leading to potential conflicts with colleagues or management. The increase in conflicts may highlight the need for targeted support and conflict resolution training for mid-level professionals who are still navigating the demands of their roles.
3. **11+ Years (45.78%, n=38)**: The highest incidence of conflicts (45.78%) was observed among healthcare professionals with over 11 years of experience. This trend could indicate that while seasoned professionals possess valuable skills and knowledge, they may also face unique challenges that lead to conflicts, such as differences in opinion regarding patient care, resistance to change, or the burden of mentoring less experienced staff. It is essential to address the underlying causes of these conflicts through open dialogue, conflict resolution training, and opportunities for professional development.

Addressing these conflicts necessitates a multipronged approach that includes improving communication, implementing team-building initiatives, and ensuring adequate administrative support to alleviate resource shortages and manage patient overload.

This study emphasizes the significance of identifying and addressing conflicts within healthcare settings, particularly in obstetrics and gynecology, where emotional and ethical complexities are prevalent. The findings highlight the need for effective conflict resolution strategies, enhanced communication, and robust support systems to improve both patient care and the well-being of healthcare providers.

Discussion

The results of this study reveal a significant prevalence of conflicts among healthcare professionals, particularly in high-stress environments like inpatient emergency services. With 83 out of 100 surveyed professionals reporting conflicts, the data underscores the urgent need for addressing interpersonal dynamics within healthcare teams. The finding that miscommunication is the leading cause of conflict, cited by 29.19% of respondents, aligns with existing literature that emphasizes the critical role of effective communication in healthcare settings (Bagnasco et al., 2019). Poor communication can lead to misunderstandings, decreased teamwork, and ultimately impact patient care quality.

The high incidence of verbal abuse (22.16%) reported by participants is particularly concerning. Verbal abuse in healthcare settings not only affects staff morale but can also compromise patient safety (Rosenstein & O'Daniel, 2006). The emotional toll of such encounters can lead to burnout and increased turnover rates among healthcare workers, exacerbating staffing shortages in critical areas.

In examining the factors contributing to conflicts, inadequate management support emerged as a prevalent trigger, impacting 35% of respondents. This finding highlights the importance of strong leadership and resource allocation in mitigating conflict. Healthcare organizations must prioritize creating supportive environments where staff feels empowered to voice concerns without fear of retribution. Such efforts may include regular feedback mechanisms and establishing clear channels for reporting issues.

The study also identifies the challenges of coordination between different roles, particularly in high-stress areas like labor and delivery and emergency departments. These findings resonate with the work of Mazzocato et al. (2012), who argue that interprofessional collaboration is essential for enhancing patient outcomes and reducing conflicts.

Training initiatives focusing on team-building and role clarity could significantly alleviate tensions in these high-pressure environments.

Moreover, the perception of communication effectiveness varied between intra-departmental interactions and inter-role communication. While 75% of respondents felt that communication within their department was effective, only 45% reported the same for communication between different roles. This discrepancy indicates a need for enhanced interdisciplinary communication strategies. Establishing regular interdepartmental meetings and collaborative training sessions can foster better relationships and understanding among diverse healthcare teams.

The findings also highlight the impact of conflicts on job satisfaction, with 50% of respondents reporting decreased satisfaction due to interpersonal conflicts. This result underscores the critical need for healthcare organizations to implement conflict resolution strategies and support systems that prioritize staff well-being. Programs that promote resilience, stress management, and peer support can be beneficial in enhancing job satisfaction and reducing turnover.

Finally, the suggested strategies to reduce conflicts, such as improved communication (60%) and team-building activities (25%), provide actionable insights for healthcare administrators. Investing in these areas can foster a positive workplace culture, ultimately leading to better patient care outcomes.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the importance of identifying and addressing conflicts within healthcare settings, particularly in high-stress areas. By understanding the dynamics of conflict, healthcare organizations can implement effective conflict resolution strategies and communication improvements that enhance both patient care and healthcare provider well-being.

Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of identifying and addressing conflicts in healthcare settings, particularly in obstetrics and gynecology, where emotional and ethical complexities are prevalent. The findings underscore the need for effective conflict resolution strategies, improved communication, and adequate support systems to enhance patient care and healthcare provider well-being.

The findings of this study underscore the urgent need for healthcare organizations to address conflicts among professionals, especially in high-pressure settings. Effective communication and support from management are crucial to mitigating conflicts and enhancing teamwork. Implementing training programs focused on communication skills and team-building can foster a collaborative work environment that benefits both healthcare providers and patients.

Furthermore, as verbal abuse and miscommunication remain prevalent issues, healthcare organizations must prioritize creating safe reporting mechanisms and fostering a culture of respect and collaboration. By investing in these strategies, healthcare institutions can improve job satisfaction, reduce burnout, and ultimately enhance the quality of patient care.

In conclusion, addressing interpersonal conflicts in healthcare settings is vital for maintaining a healthy work environment and ensuring high standards of patient care. Future research should explore the long-term effects of conflict resolution strategies and their impact on patient outcomes and staff retention.

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