

## Dynamics of the Communication Process at the Beginning of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Suceava, the First Quarantined City in Romania (II)

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**Abstract:** The article analyses the dynamics of the communication process during the quarantine meant to limit the spread of SARS-CoV2 in Suceava, the first city in Romania where this measure was imposed between March 30 and April 13, 2020. The quarantine was established after an outbreak of Covid-19 in the “Sfântul Ioan cel Nou” County Emergency Hospital, the largest hospital in Suceava County, with 1,500 employees and 1,300 beds.

We have analysed communication within the hospital by distributing a questionnaire to employees, which was answered by 57 people, the communication through the media, by following three local publications from the point of view of the community’s interest in pandemic news and the measures imposed, as well as the authorities’ discourse in crisis situation.

**Keywords:** *communication, message, speech, management, Covid-19 pandemic, Suceava.*

In order to analyse the way in which communication was perceived at the hospital level during the quarantine period, we have used the answers of 57 employees of the hospital who answered our questionnaire. Those who responded are 77.2% women and 22.8% men; 33.3% are doctors, 43.9% nurses and 22.8% other categories of staff. As for their age, 47.4% are between 30 and 50 years old, 45.6% are between 50 and 60 years old.

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\* Both authors had equal contribution in writing this paper.

1. What is the age category you fall into?

57 answers

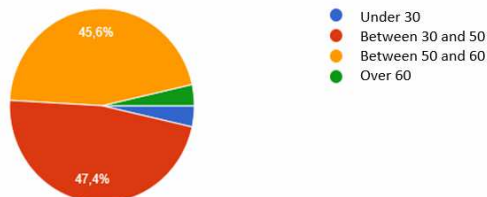


Figure 5 Age of respondents

2. Gender?

57 answers

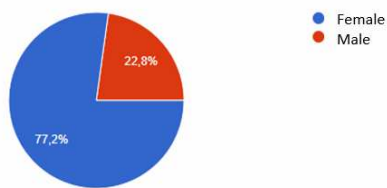


Figure 6 Type of respondents

3. What professional category do you belong to?

57 answers

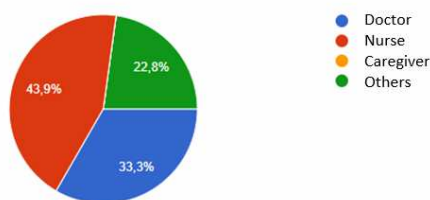
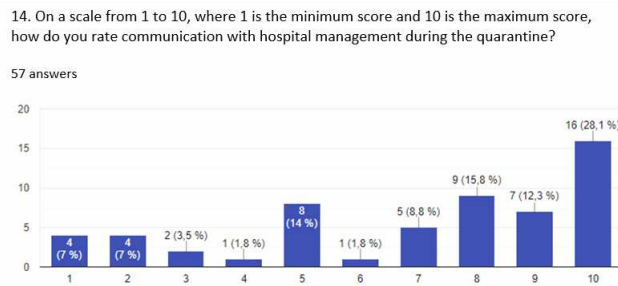


Fig. 7 Distribution of professional categories

In what concerns the question “How do you rate communication with the hospital management during the quarantine?” on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is the lowest score, more than half of the responders, that is 56.2%, evaluated it with scores from 8 to 10, while 19.3% with scores from 1 and 4. 28.1% of the same responders gave a maximum score, 10, while 7% gave a minimum score, 1.



**Figure 8 Assessing communication with hospital management**

Communication with hospital colleagues is assessed by 61.4% of the responders, with scores from 8 to 10 and by 12.4% with scores from 1 to 4. More than half of the responders, 56.3% consider that during the quarantine, the hospital benefited from a good communication with the patients and rates it with grades from 8 and 10, while 20% of them awarded scores from 1 to 4.

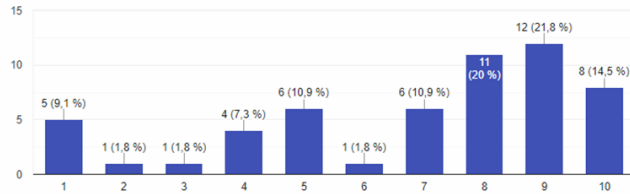


**Figure 9 Assessing communication with colleagues**

Communication with patients' families is not seen as good anymore – only 47.3% consider that the hospital kept within optimum parameters the relations with the patients' caregivers. 27.3% of the responders awarded grades from 1 to 4.

16. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is the minimum score and 10 is the maximum score, how do you rate hospital's communication with patients during the quarantine?

55 answers

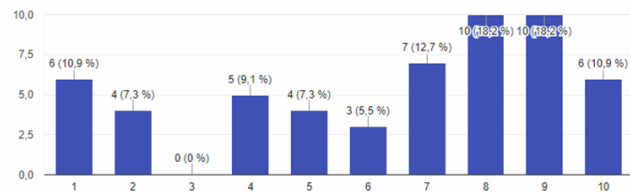


**Figure 10 Assessing hospital's communication with patients**

In the opinion of hospital employees who responded to this questionnaire during the quarantine, the hospital management had the best communication with the population – 63.2% of them giving scores between 8 to 10. Only 14.1% of them considered communication with the population as defective and awarded scores from 1 to 4.

17. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is the minimum score and 10 is the maximum score, how do you rate hospital's communication with patients' families during the quarantine?

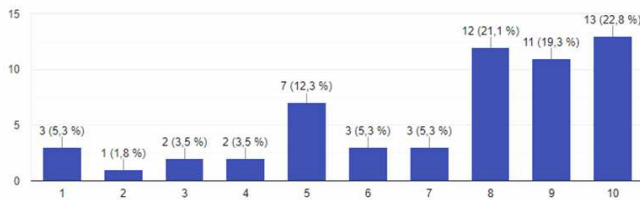
55 answers



**Figure 11 Assessing hospital's communication with the patients' families**

18. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is the minimum score and 10 is the maximum score, how do you rate hospital's communication with the population of Suceava during the quarantine?

57 answers



**Figure 12 Assessing hospital's communication with the population of Suceava**

Regarding communication in the medical system, both vertically and horizontally, this was done through the national system of standard procedures, teleconferences, working groups with instant messages, dedicated web pages.

In the case of the responders to our questionnaire, the most used sources of information about the activities in the hospital during the quarantine period were: discussions with colleagues – frequently used by 45.6%, and very little or not at all by 38.6%; communiqués from the hospital management – useful for 36.8%, less useful or useless – 33.3%; working groups on WhatsApp – used by 40.3% of responders and less used or not at all by 42.1%.

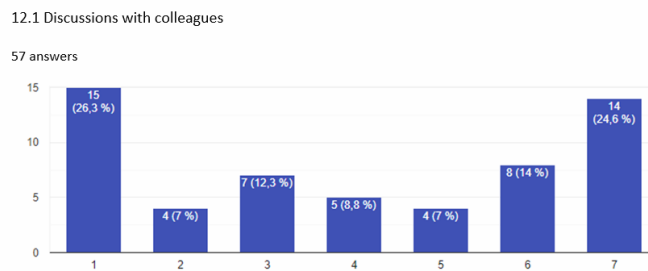


Figure 13 The most used sources of information during the quarantine period

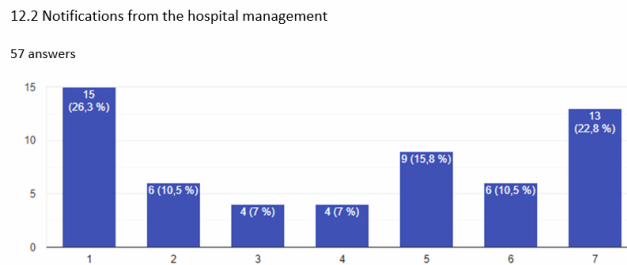


Figure 14 The most used sources of information during the quarantine period

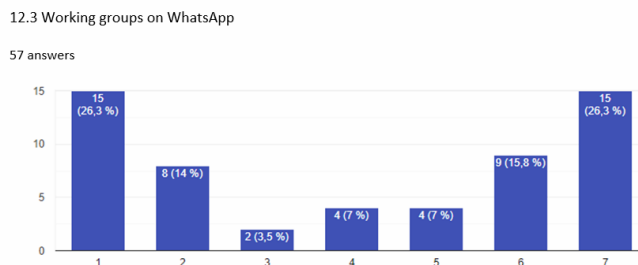
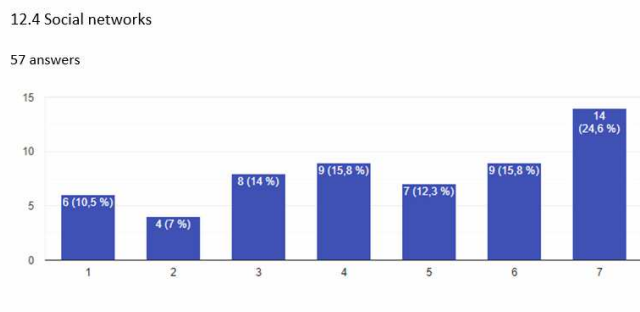
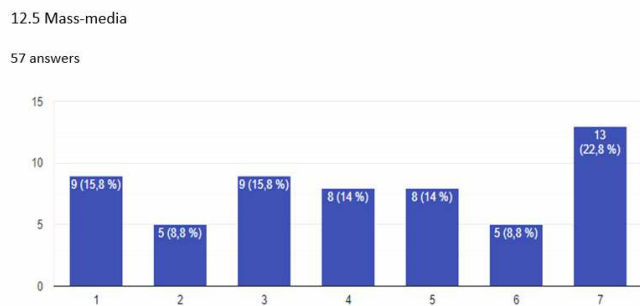


Figure 15 The most used sources of information during the quarantine period

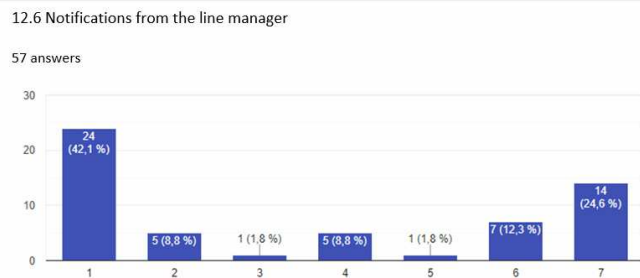
For 17.5%, social networks were useful to find out what is happening in the hospital, while for 40.4% they were not relevant. The media was an important source of information for 24.6%, while 31.6% gave little or no importance to the activities in the hospital. For more than half of the responders, i.e. 50.9%, the main source was information given by the direct boss. For 36.9%, however, they had no significance.

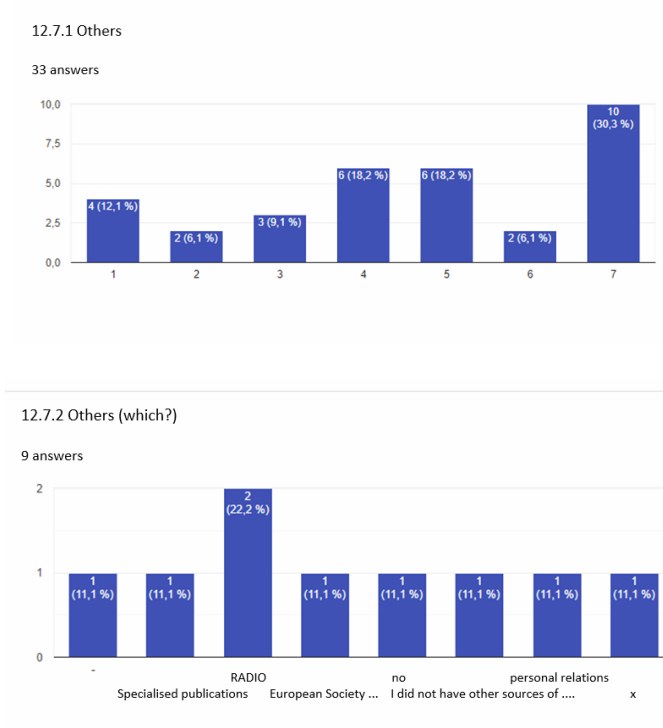


**Figure 15** The most used sources of information during the quarantine period

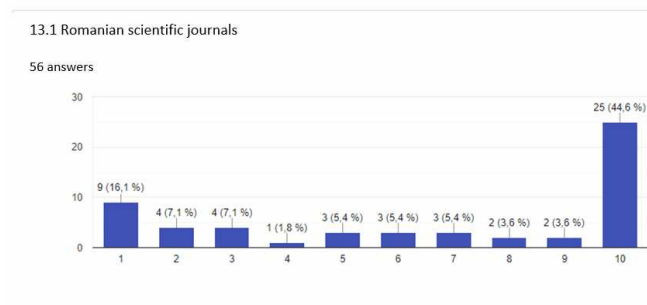


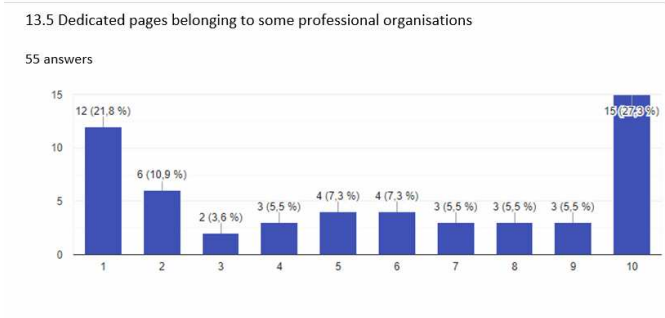
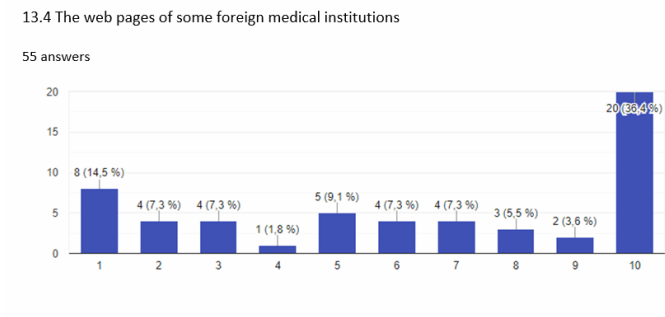
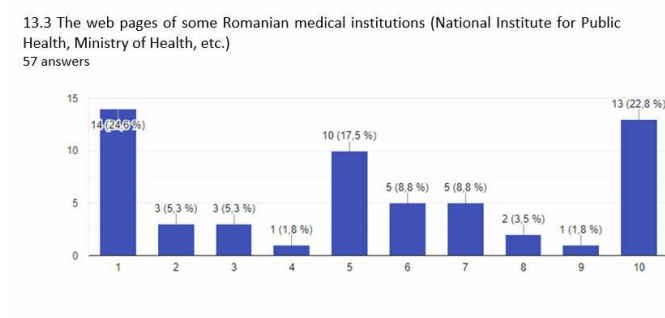
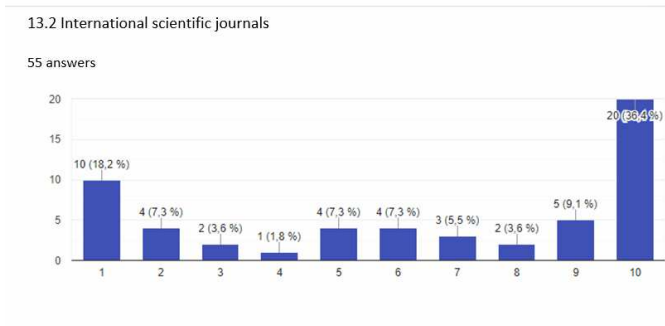
**Figure 16** The most used sources of information during the quarantine period





In what concerns professional documentation on Covid-19 pandemic, where 1 is for the most used source and 10 the least used one, the responders indicated the Romanian scientific journals as their main source of information – 16%; international scientific journals – 18.2%; the web pages of Romanian medical institutions (National Institute for Public Health, Ministry of Health, etc) – 24.6%; web pages of some medical institutions abroad – 14.5%; dedicated pages of some professional organisations – 21.8%; notifications received from the hospital – 35.1%; teleconferences – 24.5%; mass-media – 17.9%; social networks – 12.7%; others (communication with other people, with family, friends, case presentations) -11.5%.

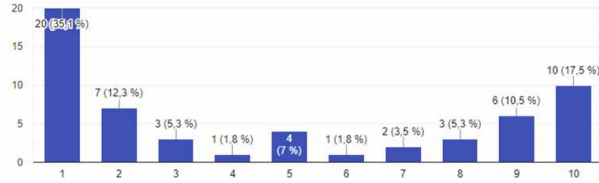






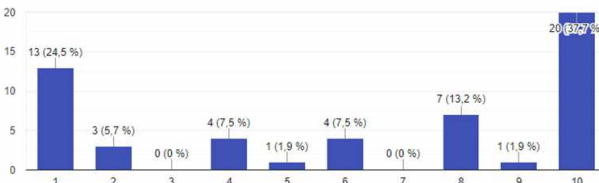
13.6 Notifications received from the hospital

57 answers



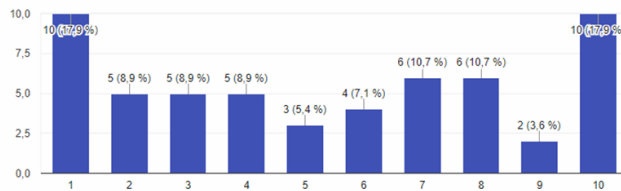
13.7 Teleconferences

53 answers



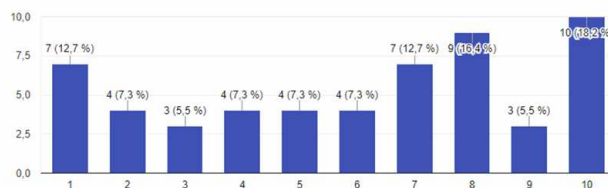
13.8 Mass-media

56 answers



13.9 Social networks

55 answers

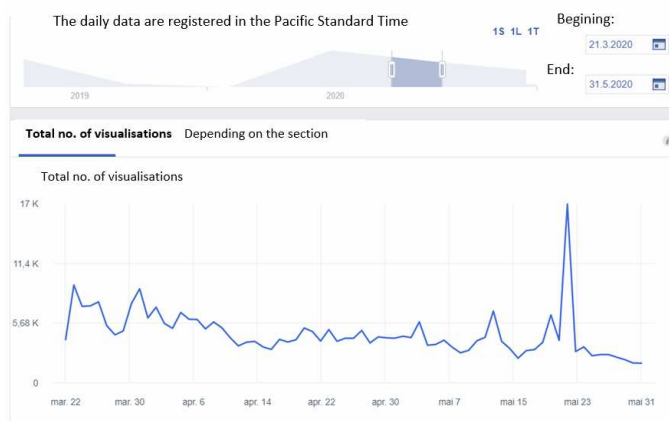


The information offered via the questionnaire reveal that for the hospital personnel, internal communication was on top of the list: communication with the

line manager, the working groups on WhatsApp and the notifications sent by hospital management.

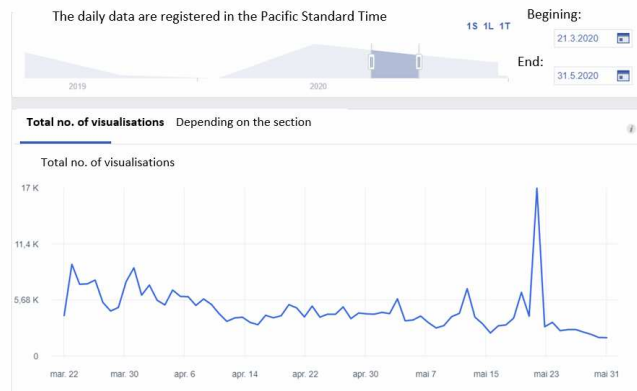
Regarding hospital communication with the population, this was conducted using mass-media, mediated by the Strategic Communication Group or directly by means of press releases, social networks, direct telephone lines, dedicated pages for various professional categories, posters and flyers.

The information supply was rich, however, the analysis of the visualisations charts of the monitored local publications, indicates that after the significant increase recorded in March and at the beginning of April, the public's interest went down and remained like this until the days before lifting the quarantine measure, when it recorded a peak, but not at the same level as it did at the beginning of the quarantine.



If in March we were talking about articles from *Monitorul de Suceava* with a number of views between 4000 and over 17,700, on May 13, when the quarantine was lifted, the news “Suceava came out of quarantine!” had 4,343 views; “In four communes in the quarantined area there are no people infected with Covid-19” – 3,372 views; “Today the number of new cases of COVID in the county has tripled: 34, compared to 11 new cases, as many as there were on Tuesday” – 2,527 views; “In Suceava County there are 620 more evolving Covid cases, 43 less than yesterday” – 2,359 views.

In our opinion, the abundance of information did not significantly influence the behaviour of the public towards information consumption in the long run. In other words, we record the situation referred to by Cuilenburg, when he identified “too much supply to demand”. “Over-computerisation disrupts the relationship between information and its effect. All the more so as the pragmatic value of the information remains constant” [Cuilenburg *et al.*, 2000: 42].



The effect of communication, according to the same source, includes “the set of processes and consequences involved in receiving messages, processes and consequences that can only be attributed to the act of communication” [Cuilenburg *et al.*, 2000: 232].

## Conclusions

From this perspective, we can conclude that a first effect that can be attributed to the communication act, in the situation analysed by us, is the unprecedented crisis of image and trust faced by the Suceava County Emergency Hospital and the medical staff, a crisis that is still present, almost two years after the pandemic broke out. We consider that this was generated by the impossibility of the hospital to have a control of the messages that arrived in the public space, but also by the absence of a convincing speech, transmitting strength, professionalism and trust, from the administrative and medical authorities at all

levels. Moreover, contradictory messages from some leaders have undermined confidence in the effectiveness of pandemic measures.

We appreciate that the lack of experience of communication in crisis situations, from the hospital management, led to delays in making decisions and communication errors with those involved: staff, population, patients, their families, the media. We consider that these errors favoured the development, on the part of the population, of an anxious behaviour, sometimes aggressive towards the medical staff and a negative attitude towards the people infected with SARS-CoV-2.

Real-time communication conducted by mass-media concerning the radical changes that were taking place at such a fast pace, has contributed to the familiarisation of the population with the means of digital communication. A separate analysis of this phenomenon could indicate if this could be a vulnerability or, on the contrary, an aid against disinformation.

Following the stabilisation of the epidemiological situation at the hospital, meaning that after lifting the quarantine measures, starting from 13<sup>th</sup> May 2020, the authorities have made considerable efforts towards rehabilitating the hospital's image and reconciling with the population of Suceava, but the reconstruction is achieved with difficulty.

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