

Service Quality Evaluation of Private Hospitals using SERVQUAL

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Abstract

Background & objectives: Service Quality Evaluation has become a vital aspect of medical care. Hospitals have expanded in terms of availability of specialties, improved technologies, facilities and increased competition and the expectations of patients and their relatives have increased many fold. The patients and their relatives coming to the hospital not only expect world-class treatment but also other facilities to make their stay comfortable in the hospital. Knowledge of expectation combined with understanding of perceived service quality facilitates designing and implementing programs to satisfy patients. The study was conducted with an objective of measuring service quality of IPD patients in a private hospital of Indore District of Madhya Pradesh.

Methods: Cross-sectional study was conducted by collecting primary data from 422 IPD patients on the day of discharge using SERVQUAL questionnaire developed by Parasuraman et al.

Results: As per the results of the study the major reason of choosing the hospital for treatment was good word-of-mouth from old patients and from senior consultants, infrastructure, proximity of hospital and expert clinical and non-clinical supportive staff. It was found that patients were highly satisfied with the basic amenities, behavior of doctors and staff of the hospital, timely medication, friendly hospital procedures and transparent billing system.

Interpretation & Conclusions: Research findings discussed demonstrate that the more a patient is satisfied the more he/she is expected to recommend the hospital to other patients who need healthcare services. Therefore hospitals should implement patient satisfaction measurement as a quality indicator and thereby actively seek to improve the services provided.

Objective: The main objective of the study is to measure the service quality of IPD (Inpatient Department) patients in a private hospital of Indore District of Madhya Pradesh.

Keywords: In-patient department, Patient satisfaction, Service quality, SERVQUAL

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Introduction

It has become necessary for hospital managers to understand and measure patients' perspectives and service quality gaps in order to identify and suitably address if there is any perceived gap in delivering services taking into consideration the resource constraints under which hospitals must function. Keeping in mind the competitive market it has now a day's become important to demonstrate that hospital services are customer-focused and directed towards providing best possible medical care to the clientele of the hospital (Pakdil & Harwood, 2005). Therefore the importance of patient's expectations in service quality evaluation has been widely acknowledged. Service quality has become an essential subject in view of its significant relationship to profit, cost saving and market share (Devlin and Dong, 1994). Researches has shown that good service quality leads to the retention of existing customers and the attraction of new ones,

reduced costs, an enhanced corporate image, positive word-of-mouth recommendation and, ultimately, enhanced profitability (Cronin et al., 2000; Kang and James, 2004). A number of studies have addressed the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction and it is generally believed that higher levels of service quality lead to higher levels of customer satisfaction (Kang and James, 2004; Pollack, 2008). Patients' service quality perceptions are believed to positively influence patient satisfaction, which sequentially influences the patient's decision positively to choose a specific healthcare provider (Andaleeb, 2001; Taylor, S., 1994). Teresa et.al (1996) defines satisfaction as a function of confirmation or disconfirmation of expectations. Patient satisfaction is a common determinant in selection of hospital, use of services, complaints during the stay and malpractice suits (Ware, 1987). The difference between customer expectations regarding a service to be received and perception of the service to be received has been conceptualized as service quality (Parasuraman et. al, 1988; Gronroos, 2001). Parasuraman et al., 1988 has defined service quality as "a global judgment or attitude relating to the overall excellence or superiority of the services." Five dimensions of service quality (viz. reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles) has been identified by Parasuraman et al. (1988) that link specific service characteristics to

customer expectations. Based on this perspective Parasuraman et al. developed a questionnaire for measuring service quality which is popularly known as SERVQUAL.

Materials and Methods

A cross-sectional study was conducted and a pre-structured and pre-tested SERVQUAL questionnaire developed by Parasuraman et al. was got filled from 422 IPD patients (on calculation sample size came to be 384, adding 10% for incomplete answers the total came out to be 422) of a Private Hospital of Indore district of Madhya Pradesh on the day of their discharge who were selected using Simple Random Sampling depending upon the total average no. of discharges/day. SERVQUAL is designed to measure quality expectations and perceptions about quality of services using 22 items representing five dimensions, using a seven-point Likert scale: 1. Tangibles – physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel. 2. Reliability – ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. 3. Responsiveness – willingness to help consumers and provide prompt service. 4. Assurance – competence, courtesy and security. 5. Empathy – caring and individualized attention. Consumer ratings across all the 22 items of the survey instrument were collected in paired expectation and perception scores and then service quality gaps were identified and statistically analyzed using SPSS software. Informed consent was taken from the patient before filling the questionnaire. Period of study was April 2014 to Sept 2014. Keeping inclusion criteria as the patients who have used hospital services during the study period and exclusion criteria as patients working in healthcare facilities and follow-up patients getting readmitted during the same study period.

Results and Discussions

A total of 422 IPD patients were included in the study to know their perceptions towards the quality of the services provided by the hospital. It was found that most of the respondents were between the age group of 25 yrs-55 yrs and having high level of education. The major reason of choosing the Private Hospital for treatment was good word-of-mouth from old patients and from senior consultants, infrastructure, proximity of hospital, and expert clinical and non-clinical supportive staff for treatment. It was found that patients were highly satisfied with the basic amenities, behavior of doctors and staff of the hospital, timely medication and friendly hospital procedures and transparent billing system.

Characteristics of the IPD patients: It includes information on sex, age, and literacy level of the IPD patients. It shows that 48% patients were males and rest 52% were females. 82% of respondents belong to the

age group of 16-30 years and 18% respondents to 0-15 year age group. The education level of the respondents was good as most of them (74%) were literate and almost all of them fall in the higher income group population.

Reasons for choosing the facility: Good word-of-mouth from old patients and from senior consultants (83%) and good infrastructure was one of the most cited reasons (86%) for choosing the hospital for treatment. Majority of the patients (93%) said that the main source of information about the hospital was family members/relatives, friends and the treating consultant. Almost all the respondents (97%) (Including those using self-owned vehicles and those using public transport) were satisfied by the proximity of the hospital. The time taken to reach the hospital was less than 15 minutes for more than half of the respondents (77%). Almost all the respondents did not find any problem in locating the hospital (95%) or locating different departments within the hospital (93%).

Registration process: 93% IPD patients said the registration process was easy and waiting time was less. The patients were happy with the behavior of registration counter staff.

Basic amenities: It was observed that almost all the respondents were highly satisfied with the basic amenities such as sitting arrangement for the patients and attendants, cleanliness, fans, toilets, drinking water, and telephone facility. The main reason being the good infrastructure of the hospital.

Most of the respondents (74%) found sitting arrangement in the waiting areas adequate and 91% respondents found hospitals adequately cleaned and 89% were pleased with the lighting arrangements at the hospital. Most of the respondents said that the hospital wards and corridors were well ventilated. About toilet facility, 74% respondents said it was clean whereas 26% respondents said it was dirty. 99% of the respondents reported that the drinking water facility was available as an RO was placed on all the floors of the hospital also all the respondents were happy with the telephone facility in the hospital.

Almost all the respondents (93%) were highly satisfied with the sign boards placed in the hospital premises to help and direct the patients at the right place without any trouble. 98% respondents felt that all the hospital staff was neat in appearance as all the staff had their proper uniform and I cards were also worn.

Perception of IPD patients towards doctors: As per the collected data the waiting time for IPD patients was very less. Most of the patients (78%) said that they have to wait less than 10 minutes for the doctor. Majority of the patients (above 93%) have observed that doctor's behavior was good at all the facilities and they also felt that the doctor has given adequate time to see the patients.

Pharmacy: 413 of the 422 respondents had availed the pharmacy facility of the hospital. Most of the

respondents (89%) were satisfied with the queue system. As the data revealed behavior of pharmacist was either good (86%) or satisfactory (14%) for all the respondents. With regard to the quality and availability of drugs response was good (67%) or satisfactory (31%) and only 2% considered it poor. Almost all the respondents were happy with the 24x7 availability of required medicines in the medical shop of the hospital.

Dressing room: Out of 422 patients only 135 utilized the dressing room facility. Almost all the patients (97%) found the dressing room clean and majority of the respondents (92%) were satisfied with the promptness in providing service at dressing rooms. Regarding the behavior of the dressing room staff majority (94%) of the patients perceived the behavior of the dressing room staff as good.

Clinical and supportive staff services: 89% of respondents were highly satisfied with the timely, prompt services provided by the hospital staff. Respondents observed that an error free record was kept by the duty nurses and duty doctors in the treatment file of the IPD patients and patient treatment status was correctly communicated to the consultants which in due course helped the consultants to treat the patients properly and finally in quick recovery of the patient. The data shows that behavior of the staff was either good (84%) or satisfactory (16%) for all the respondents. Respondents said that hospital staff is sincere and courteous while dealing with the patient treatment procedure and also while dealing with their queries. With regard to the quality and accuracy of staff work, response was good (79%) or satisfactory (19%) and only 2% considered it poor. Respondents felt safe as they experienced that staff understood the needs of the patients, gave proper attention to the issues of the patients and were expert in dealing with the medical aspects of the treatment of the patient.

Radiology and pathology services: Most of the respondents (89%) said that the hospital had modern equipments and physical facilities were visually appealing. Respondents (74%) observed that the ward staff on duty received quick reports of all the pathological investigations which in the due course facilitated the timely treatment of the patients. They also had confidence on the accuracy of the investigation results as the laboratory was NABL accredited.

Discharge Process: Almost all the respondents (98%) experienced less waiting time in the complete process of discharge. Final bills were first prepared at the billing counter and then the patient/attenders were informed to come at the counter which ultimately resulted in no queues on the counter. The 95% of respondents were satisfied with the transparent billing system. They observed that the hospital had a board at the billing counter which displayed the charges of the various services available at the hospital. As the data shows, 89% of the respondents were happy with the behaviour of the billing counter staff and said that the

staff was courteous enough to deal with the billing queries of the respondents.

Limitations: Firstly, the respondents were only inpatients thus views of outpatients could not be covered during the study which in effect may affect the result to some extent. The study was also limited to patients of a private hospital only. As a result it is therefore suggested that further study be carried out in the public healthcare facilities in order to ascertain a comprehensive understanding of patients' satisfaction in healthcare delivery. To fully assess the quality of healthcare delivery and patient satisfaction, it is expected that both technical and functional aspects of the hospital services be considered. Thus another limitation to this study is that it considered only the functional aspects of the service delivery as only patients' view were used for the research purpose.

Conclusion

Evaluating service quality is very important for a private hospital to win the lifelong loyalty of patients and sustain in today's competitive market. Good mouth to mouth, good infrastructure, proximity of hospital, expert clinical and non-clinical supportive staff for treatment, less waiting time and cleanliness are vital components of quality of service. Study showed that patients' satisfaction significantly depend on empathetic services such as nursing care, respectfulness and helpfulness of nurses and attentiveness of doctors to patients. The level of comfort in the ward also has a great influence on patient satisfaction. It was found that patients were highly satisfied with the basic amenities, timely medication and friendly hospital procedures and transparent billing system. The findings of the present study using SERVQUAL can be utilized to improve the services provided by a private hospital of the state leading to higher level of patient satisfaction. In order to achieve this, it is evidently necessary to capture information on patient requirements, expectations and perceptions so as to assess their satisfaction about the service they receive. This will then help health care providers to identify the areas where improvements are needed. The higher the level of patient satisfaction the more are chances of them recommending the hospital to other patients.

Recommendations and Suggestions

Patient satisfaction survey should be conducted periodically to timely discover and overcome possible gaps in the process of providing quality services to the patients. To improve the level of patient satisfaction and quality of services the healthcare managers should focus more on the dimensions of Assurance, Reliability and Empathy. As a result, more training to improve professional knowledge and skills for doctors and nurses; better practicing communication skills of hospital staff with patients; improving behaviors of hospital staff would be important approaches to achieve

a high level of patient satisfaction. Concerning the patient comfort patient meals should be provided by the hospital dietary services.

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