A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PATIENT'S SATISFACTION FROM GOVERNMENT HOSPITAL SYSTEM IN SAUDI ARABIA

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the patient's satisfaction from the services quality of hospital system at the government hospitals in Saudi Arabia to suggest the major areas of improvement to enhance the patients' experience from government hospitals system. The study draws results from empirical data collected through the administration of structured close ended questionnaire to the people of Saudi Arabia who had ever availed the services of the government hospital. The researcher used 'Five point Likert scale' to measure the satisfaction level from highly satisfied to least satisfied. Eight variables were identified to represent the overall system of the hospital. Data were collected according to convenience sampling method from 400 respondents. The findings of the study showed that the patients were not satisfied with the services included in the hospital system, thus indicating to the management of the government hospitals to focus on service enhancement and improvement.

Keywords: Government hospitals, Patient satisfaction, Service quality, Saudi Arabia

INTRODUCTION

Hospitals are important vehicles for delivery of health care services, they are considered the focal points for health services delivery and consume almost 30 per cent of the national health care budgets (Pestonjee et al., 2005). In todays' highly competitive environment, healthcare organizations are increasingly realizing the need to focus on service quality as a measure to improve their competitive position. Health sector reform is underway driven by social change, financial pressures and demand from various quarters for better health (Lee et al. 2000). Saudi Arabia is no exception and has been going through reforms in its health care. The government

owned hospitals in any country plays major role and owns the responsibility of free health care for all its citizens and resident members. But the government hospitals are often characterized as being inefficient and ineffective, as evidenced by anecdotes of patients' dissatisfaction and disaffections, and personal observation (Lehman et al., 2002; Leon et al. 2001). It is often argued that the efficiency and quality of the private sector is higher than the public in most sectors; however through the developing world the government remains the largest provider of health care (Doyle et al. 1997). A patient is generally in a situation of urgency and wants smooth flow and fast treatment. He expects minimum distractions in the hospitals services and prefers step by step fast moving services leading to his treatment. Thus in the current study the researcher attempted to measure the satisfaction of the patients from system in the hospital. The system here means the step by step services that he has to go to get the required treatment.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Present era is the era of consumerism, where the consumer is well informed and expects as well as demands the goods and services according to his specifications. Organizations presently concerned with satisfaction of the users of its products or services. The subject of satisfaction has been extensively studied in various fields such as marketing, and health care management. Satisfaction of users had been very often considered as an indicator of service quality. However the satisfaction is about comparison between expectation and performance. If the performance matches the expectations, the customer (patient) is satisfied (Nair, (2004), it can also be define as the extent of an individual' experience compared with his/her expectations (Pascoe, 1983). Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988, 1991) defined perceived quality as a gap between consumers' expectations and consumers' perception regarding the service. The inter-relationships between quality, value and satisfaction have recent focus of the research to explain how they relate to each other and how they drive consumer behaviour (Cronin et al, 2000). There can be various factors that explain variations in the customer satisfaction with hospitals include communication with patients, competence of the staff, their demeanour, quality of the facilities and perceived costs (Andaleeb, 1998). In private hospitals patient-perception of health care quality is critical to the success of a health care organization because of the their influence on patient satisfaction and hospital profitability (Donabedian, (1996). Patients demand more information than ever and do not hesitate to switch to other health care providers if they do not obtain satisfaction (Ramasaran-Fowdar, 2008). This study focuses on studying the patients' satisfaction from the government hospital system which he/she has to follow ones he arrived to the hospital.

METHODOLOGY

The research is empirical study which collected data from the respondents through structured close-ended questionnaires. The questionnaire developed in English was translated into Arabic language as the respondents were mainly Saudi citizens and from other gulf countries such as Egypt, Jordan etc. The patient's satisfaction level was measured on Five point Likert Scale were 5 equal to Highly Satisfied, 4 equal to Satisfied, 3 equal to Somewhat Satisfied, 2 equal to Dissatisfied and 1 equal to Highly Dissatisfied.

Variables to represent the system of a hospital were identified by the observation method. Eight variables identified in this study namely; reception services, receptionist services, appointment process, follow up, guidance and help, waiting time at reception, online appointment, appointment on telephone, and the last variable enquired about the overall satisfaction from the hospital system.

Convenience sampling methodology was used to identify the respondents to administer the questionnaires. The sample size of the study was 400 respondents. Before administering the questionnaire it was orally confirmed that the respondent had used the services of government hospital. The respondents were employees working in various companies across the kingdom. The respondents were presently pursuing bachelor degree in various programs of College of Business Rabigh, King Abdulaziz University through part time and distance learning program. Researchers personally administered the questionnaires to the respondents during the counseling session conducted prior to the final exam as well as during the final exam.

Hypotheses

In this study the researcher proposes eight hypotheses for each variable to be tested from the empirical results. The proposed hypotheses are;

H1   Patients were satisfied from the Reception services

H2   Patients were satisfied from the Receptionist services

H3   Patients were satisfied from the Appointment process

H4   Patients were satisfied from the Follow up services

H5   Patients were satisfied from Guidance and help

H6   Patients were satisfied from Waiting time at Reception

H7   Patients were satisfied from Online appointment

H8   Patients were satisfied from Appointment on telephone

H9   Patients were satisfied from Overall experience with the hospital system

ANALYSIS AND EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Reliability of data

The results in table 1 showed that the data were highly reliable represented by the high Cronbach Alpha value of .860, thus the results drawn from the analysis tend to be reliable for interpretation and managerial implications.

Table 1: Reliability Test

Variables	Reliability value
Hospital System	
Reception	**.860**
Receptionist	
Appointment process	
Follow-up	
Guidance and help	
Waiting time at reception	
Online appointment	
Appointment on telephone	
Your overall experience with the hospital system	

Patients' satisfaction with Hospital System

The results of the patients' satisfaction from the hospital system are presented in table 2 and table 3 followed by a figure. Patients' satisfaction on hospital system has been measured along eight variables. The eight variables included in hospital system are reception services, receptionist services, appointment process, follow up, guidance and help, waiting time at reception, online appointment, and appointment on telephone. The results in hospital system exhibit results of Dissatisfaction among the patients. The number of respondents satisfied (highly satisfied + satisfied) are very less in number, from 400 only 100 are satisfied with the services at reception (25%). The results for other categories of services showed the same trend of low satisfaction namely; from receptionist only 117 (29.3%) were satisfied, from appointment process 64 (16%) were satisfied, from follow up services 78 (19.5%) were satisfied, from guidance and help 105 (26.2%) were satisfied, from waiting time at the reception 64 (16%) were satisfied, from online appointment services 69 (17.2%) were satisfied, and from appointment on telephone services 62 (15.5%) were satisfied. To the last question in the hospital system category about their overall experience with the hospital system only 54 (13.5%) patients' expressed satisfaction. This means that patients 346 (86.5%) were either dissatisfied or neutral to 'hospital system' services.

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Table 2: Patient's satisfaction on hospital system

Parameters	N	Number of patients reporting				
		Highly dissatisfied	Not satisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Highly satisfied
Reception	400	104	90	106	60	40
Receptionist	400	85	102	96	71	46
Appointment process	400	213	54	69	37	27
Follow up	400	158	82	82	51	27
Guidance and help	400	107	88	100	66	39
Waiting time at reception	400	185	77	74	41	23
Online appointment	400	203	52	76	37	32
Appointment on telephone	400	223	55	60	31	31
Overall experience with the hospital system	400	151	84	111	29	25

Table 3: Patient's satisfaction from Hospital System
(in Percentage)

Reception	25.0
Receptionist	29.3
Appointment process	16.0
Follow up	19.5
Guidance and help	26.3
Waiting time at reception	16.0
Online appointment	17.3
Appointment on telephone	15.5
Overall experience with the hospital system	13.5

ANOVA analysis of In-patient and Out-patient Satisfaction

The results of the ANOVA analysis in table 4, showed similar results of low satisfaction level in both the categories of the patient (in-patient and out-patient) for hospital system. For all the nine variables in the list of the hospital system, the mean values are less than 3, in most of the cases it is very close to 2. The low mean value indicates the low satisfaction levels of the patients. In both the categories namely in-patient and out-patient, there is no significant difference. The mean value for the overall experience with the hospital system for out-patients is 2.30 and for in-patients is 2.18 which is low and indicates dissatisfaction among both the categories. However the differences are not statistically significant.

Table 4: ANNOVA - Satisfaction on hospital system across patient types

Type of Treatment	Out patient			In patient			F	Df	Sig.
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation			
Reception	161	2.63	1.317	239	2.59	1.274	.132	1	.717
Receptionist	161	2.86	2.691	239	2.76	1.331	.251	1	.616
Appointment process	161	2.04	1.325	239	2.02	1.283	.041	1	.840
Follow up	161	2.24	1.292	239	2.29	1.282	.161	1	.688
Guidance and help	161	2.66	1.270	239	2.56	1.323	.565	1	.453
Waiting time at reception	161	2.12	1.244	239	2.08	1.261	.101	1	.751
Online appointment	161	2.11	1.328	239	2.10	1.342	.003	1	.958
Appointment on telephone	161	2.03	1.371	239	1.95	1.271	.408	1	.523
Overall experience with the hospital system	161	2.30	1.240	239	2.18	1.184	.955	1	.329

DISCUSSIONS

The study was undertaken with the two objectives first; measuring the satisfaction of patients from hospital system in place at government hospitals in Saudi Arabia and second based on the results to propose the areas of improvement to enhance the patients experience from government hospital system.

The results showed above in table two, three and four shows that the patients were not satisfied with the services at government hospitals. The findings are similar to the previous findings which characterized the services of the government hospitals as inefficient and ineffective (Lehman et al., 2002; Leon et al. 2001). The following hypothesis had been proposed to be tested from the results in table 5.

The results in table 5 showed that for all the nine variables the mean values had been less than 3. The mean value for appointment on telephone is lowest 1.98 significant at 95% confidence level followed appointment process Mean value 2.03 Std. Dev. 1.298; waiting time at reception Mean value 2.10, Std. Dev. 1.253; online appointment Mean value 2.11, Std. Dev. 1.334; overall experience with the hospital system Mean value 2.23, Std. Dev. 1.207; follow up Mean value 2.27, Std. Dev. 1.285, reception Mean value 2.61, Std. Dev. 1.290, guidance and help Mean value 2.61, Std. Dev. 1.301; and receptionist Mean value 2.80, Std. Dev. 1.991. The results for all the variables were statistically significant at 95% confidence. Thus, based on the results all the hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6, H7, H8, and H9 *were* rejected.

Table 5: One sample t test - Patient's satisfaction on hospital system

	Parameters	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
H1	Reception	400	2.61	1.290	-6.126**	399	0.000
H2	Receptionist	400	2.80	1.991	-1.984*	399	0.048
H3	Appointment process	400	2.03	1.298	-14.979**	399	0.000
H4	Follow up	400	2.27	1.285	-11.405**	399	0.000
H5	Guidance and help	400	2.61	1.301	-6.071**	399	0.000
H6	Waiting time at reception	400	2.10	1.253	-14.370**	399	0.000
H7	Online appointment	400	2.11	1.334	-13.378**	399	0.000
H8	Appointment on telephone	400	1.98	1.311	-15.560**	399	0.000
H9	Overall experience with the hospital system	400	2.23	1.207	-12.716**	399	0.000

**significant at 0.01 level, * significant at 0.05 level

CONCLUSION

The hospital system in Saudi Arabia is going through restructuring. The government has made health insurance compulsory for all in phases strongly indicating its' commitment to enhance and improve the state of health services for its residence. Thus the researcher conducted this study with the main objective of finding the satisfaction level of the patients from the present quality of health services of government hospitals system in Saudi Arabia to provide insight to the policy makers in health industry. The empirical results show that the patients were not satisfied from hospital system at the government hospitals in Saudi Arabia. It needs overall enhancement program from reception to appointment on telephone.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study is based on observation method for identifying the variables to represent the hospital system. Though the above variables are very important services from the patients perspective, a more scientific measurement tools needs to be developed to identify the variables to be included in the hospital system in delivering services to the patients.

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