

SERVICE QUALITY PERCEPTION AND SERVICE UTILIZATION AMONG CANCER PATIENTS IN SELECT PRIVATE HOSPITALS, ERNAKULAM DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

The study is conducted through structured questionnaire which is designed to collect information from the patients who are affected with cancer in different stages and are undergoing many types of treatments in the select private hospitals of Ernakulam District, Kerala. Aim of the study is to measure the utilization of services provided by the hospitals to the Cancer Patients. This research conducted using the primary data collected from cancer patients undergoing treatment in select hospitals in the Ernakulam district. According to the statistics obtained from the two hospitals in Ernakulam District during the years 2015-16, total number of Cancer Patients was about 5200 (approx.). Out of which 459 Cancer Patients were identified as samples respondents for the study. The objectives framed for the present study formed the basis of identification of the relevant statistical techniques such as Garrett Ranking Technique and ANOVA. Utilisation of services by the cancer patients are classified based on Purpose of visit, is considered to Garrett ranking method. Further, to measure the mean difference using ANOVA between the independent variables (utilization of services) and perception of cancer patients on the service quality dimensions (empathy, tangibility, assurance, timeliness and responsiveness). It is concluded that the highest rank on advantages of utilizing the services was for **Tie-up with health insurance companies** and the last rank was for **Exclusive treatment from exclusive doctors**. Anova measuring mean difference between purpose of visit and service quality dimensions shows statistically significant between purpose of visit and assurance. Treatment achieved the higher level of perception. Majority of the patients are women who come down for breast cancer treatment. It is recommended that, timeliness for the patients under treatment is considered more important though the institutions exhibited professionalism there are some mismatch in the observation during survey also verbal communication about long duration taken to attend the patients, delayed attention by the staff nurses also time taken by the hospital administration during discharge are some marginal defects reported by the patients which can be comfortably taken care by the hospitals running with professional settings. Both hospitals provide equal quality of service, however, patients have difference of opinion with respect to cost and utilization of services which does not have major implications to address.

Key Words: Service Quality, Perception, Satisfaction, Cancer, Patients, Hospital, etc.

1. INTRODUCTION

"Health care services" encompasses a whole lot of areas dealing with health, and it has been defined to include the provision of medicines, medical or surgical treatment provided, nursing, hospital service, dental service, optometrical service, complementary health services and so on. It also deals with the enumerated services or any other necessary services of like character, provided to an individual when he is sick or has met with a personal injury. There are ten categories of essential health services that any health

insurance plan is expected to cover, under the Affordable Care Act. The categories are: a) The services from the doctor b) the inpatient and outpatient care provided by the hospital, c) coverage for the prescription drugs, d) pregnancy and childbirth, e) services for mental health services, and so on. More than just the provision of the services, what is important is the quality of the services provided. The best judge regarding the health care service provided is the patient himself/herself, and they express it in terms of their personal satisfaction.

Cancer is the top most cause of death in the world, and this is a disease which is associated with a great deal of morbidity and mortality in the present world, and it has been known to affect any and every part of the human being. Since this disease has a greater effect on the psychology of the patient and the people involved in their lives, there is a great deal of involvement of the psychologist and social workers along with the physicians in order to help the patients to overcome and deal with the various unpleasant experience, as they progress through the various phases of the treatment and the stages of the disease.

1.1. SERVICE QUALITY

Service quality, the focus point of the study, has been defined as the discrepancy that is present in the customer's perceptions of services that is being provided by the firm and against the expectations they harbor regarding the firm's offering of such services. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) further analyzed and refined the model, and brought it down to a more parsimonious five dimensions of service quality consisting of parameters namely: Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy. One of the most used model, and most acceptable model in the industry and in the academic field, with respect to evaluating the customer expectations and their perceptions with regards to the service quality, is the SERVQUAL scale.

1.2. CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Customer satisfaction is a dichotomous decision. It is a very personal feeling or a subjective feeling, of either pleasure or disappointment. This usually results from the comparison of the services provided by the firm to the individual, against the expectations that individual had about the service provider. It has been seen and documented that a very satisfied customer stays very loyal to the firm for longer duration, and even patronizes the firm in future.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Al-Hussami et al., (2017)¹ undertook their work in Jordan, and yet their work provides the insight needed for the world. The study clearly elucidates that there is a definite requirement to increase the quality of care and various services provided by the hospitals, not just in Jordan, but on the global scale. This enhancement is required both for the healthcare providers and consumers just the same. The study explored whether the patients were satisfied with the service they received, based on their intention to revisit the same hospital. The authors report that the healthcare organizations of Jordan, have performed below par in comparison to the world standard and that it is imperative that the Hospital administrators and directors of nursing pay sufficient attention towards implementation of quality control in all the services they provided and aim at providing high quality service, which would then reflect as patients satisfaction and their intention to revisit.

Linimol L.T. and Chandrachoodan Nair B., (2016)², studied the quality of healthcare services in Saudi Arabian hospitals. The authors used a structured questionnaire – the SERVQUAL instrument – to

¹ Al-Hussami M, Al-Momani M, Hammad S, Maharmeh M, Darawad M (2017) Patients' perception of the quality of nursing care and related hospital services. *Health Prim Car* 1: doi: 10.15761/HPC.1000110

² Linimol L.T. and Chandrachoodan Nair B., (2016), "An assessment of service quality and patient satisfaction in healthcare services using SERVQUAL", *Journal of Chemical and Pharmaceutical Sciences* Volume 9 Issue 4, pp.1868-1872.

study the perceptions of expatriates about the quality of healthcare services in Saudi Arabian hospitals. The study identified various areas to improve healthcare services in Saudi Arabia and the factors that influence the referral rates among expatriate patients regarding the choice of healthcare service provider. The findings also helped the authors to gain deeper understanding on how the patients weighed the service quality and which aspects the patients were happy with.

Akreditasyon (2014)³ clearly elucidated that the prime concern for any healthcare service firm is to guard and enhance the health of the individual on all planes of existence, namely the physical, mental and social plane, and to continue to improve thereby the well-being and also the happiness of the society as a whole. As with any service providing organization, in the healthcare industry too, there is a very crucial role for service quality, and by extension, it becomes important for the firm to constantly monitor the perceptions of the clients involving various dimensions of quality, and appropriately adjusting the measures they need to implement. The age, sex, income of the patients, are some of the parameters that seem to influence the perception of quality in the healthcare industry.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The study is conducted through structured questionnaire which is designed to collect information from the patients who are affected with cancer in different stages and are undergoing many types of treatments in the select private hospitals of Ernakulam District, Kerala.

Therefore it becomes necessary to evaluate

- Whether the service utilized by the Cancer Patients is sufficient enough during treatment in the select hospitals?

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To measure the utilization of services provided by the hospitals to the Cancer Patients

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research in common parlance refers to the search of knowledge. The sources of data included both primary as well as secondary data. Questionnaires were used for the primary data collection where as secondary data collection was made based on the information provided by the hospital officials. This research conducted using the primary data collected from cancer patients undergoing treatment in select hospitals in the Ernakulam district. Simple Random sampling method was followed considering the probability of the patients in the hospital. According to the statistics obtained from the two hospitals in Ernakulam District during the years 2015-16, total number of Cancer Patients was about 5200 (approx.). Out of which 459 Cancer Patients were identified as samples respondents for the study. The objectives framed for the present study formed the basis of identification of the relevant statistical techniques such as Garrett Ranking Technique and ANOVA.

5. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Utilisation of services by the cancer patients are classified based on Purpose of visit, is considered to Garrett ranking method. Further, to measure the mean difference using ANOVA between the independent variables (utilization of services) and perception of cancer patients on the service quality dimensions (empathy, tangibility, assurance, timeliness and responsiveness).

5.1. GARRETT RANKING METHOD

³ Akreditasyon Birim Sorumlusu, T.C. Sağlık Bakanlığı, Sağlıkta Kalite ve Akreditasyon Daire Başkanlığı, (2014), "Perceived Service Quality in Healthcare Organizations and a Research in Ankara by Hospital Type" Journal of Ankara Studies, 2(1), 22-34.

Table 1: Advantages of utilizing the services in the select hospitals

Opinion	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6
Hospital Image and reputation	78	113	133	32	45	58
Multi-speciality services offered	55	64	87	65	76	112
Appropriate treatment with cost effectiveness	83	104	20	41	124	87
Tie-up with health insurance companies	180	110	40	45	50	34
Proximity of claim and easy medi-claim facilities	24	59	131	89	65	91
Exclusive treatment from exclusive doctors	39	9	48	187	99	77

Table 1 shows the rating of the cancer patients with respect to advantages of utilizing the services provided by the select hospitals in Ernakulam district which is further computed to achieve the Garrett Score, Garrett Mean and Garrett Rank.

Table 2: Rank on advantages of utilizing the services in the select hospitals

Advantages	Garrett Score	Garrett Mean	Garrett Rank
Hospital Image and reputation	24778	53.98	2
Multi-speciality services offered	21343	46.50	4
Appropriate treatment with cost effectiveness	22498	49.02	3
Tie-up with health insurance companies	27652	60.24	1
Proximity of claim and easy medi-claim facilities	21231	46.25	5
Exclusive treatment from exclusive doctors	20198	44.00	6

Table 2 reveals the rank on advantages of utilising the services in the select hospitals based on the rating by the respondents are presented considering highest and lowest Garrett mean with the statements and mean values in the said order. The statement “Tie-up with health insurance companies” was ranked number one followed by second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth ranks for the statements viz. “Hospital Image and reputation”, “Appropriate treatment with cost effectiveness”, “Multi-speciality services offered”, “Proximity of claim and easy medi-claim facilities”, and “Exclusive treatment from exclusive doctors” with Garrett mean of 60.24, 53.98, 49.02, 46.50, 46.25 and 44.00 respectively.

5.2 ANOVA

Table 3: Mean difference between Perception on service Quality and Purpose of visit

Purpose of visit	Empathy	Tangibility	Assurance	Timeliness	Responsiveness
Observation	18.81	18.88	18.09	20.50	12.20
	126	126	126	126	126
	4.454	4.870	4.211	4.332	3.020
Surgery	18.22	18.29	17.32	20.90	11.62
	196	196	196	196	196
	4.165	4.901	4.363	3.817	3.246

Post surgery	18.26	17.99	18.51	19.53	11.47
	99	99	99	99	99
	4.174	4.929	4.320	4.586	2.929
Treatment	18.79	18.63	19.08	20.16	12.08
	38	38	38	38	38
	4.307	4.951	4.716	4.104	2.981
Total	18.44	18.41	17.93	20.43	11.78
	459	459	459	459	459
	4.254	4.898	4.368	4.179	3.101
F-Value (df:3,455)	0.626 (0.599)	0.698 (0.554)	2.804* (0.039)	2.473 (0.061)	1.385 (0.247)

Table 3 shows that the overall mean scores for Empathy ranges from 18.22 to 18.81. The result shows high (18.81) with respect observation reported for the purpose of visit and the ANOVA result confirms F-value is 0.626 statistically insignificant between the purpose of visit and empathy to support (H₀5a) the null hypothesis. Mean scores for Tangibility ranges from 17.99 to 18.88. Result shows high mean scores (18.88) with respect to observation undergone by the patients during their visit to the hospital with the obtained F-value is 0.698 which is statistically insignificant to support (H₀5b) the null hypothesis. Mean scores of Assurance ranges from 17.32 to 18.51. Result shows high (18.51) level of assurance with respect to post surgery undergone during their purpose of visit to the hospital with the obtained F-value of 2.804 is statistically insignificant. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H₀5c) is rejected. Mean scores of timeliness ranges from 19.53 to 20.90. Result shows high mean scores (20.50) level of timeliness with respect to observation undergone during their purpose of visit to the hospital with the F-value of 2.473 to support (H₀6d) the null hypothesis at 5% level. Mean scores of responsiveness ranges from 11.47 to 12.20 and is found high (12.20) among patients based on observation undergone during their purpose of visit to the hospital with the F-value of 1.385 which signifies that there is no statistical significance to accept (H₀6e) the null hypothesis. Further, Tukey's post hoc method is used to measure the purpose of visit and service quality perception.

Table 4 : Purpose of visit and Assurance

Purpose of visit	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Surgery	196	17.32	
Observation	126	18.08	18.08
Post surgery	99	18.50	18.50
Treatment	38		19.07
Sig.		.102	.172

Table 4 explains that the difference between purpose of visit and assurance shows treatment (M=19.07) achieved the higher level of perception than surgery, observation and post surgery services.

6. SUMMARY OF RESULTS

6.1. FINDINGS

- It is concluded that the highest rank on advantages of utilizing the services was for **Tie-up with health insurance companies** and the last rank was for **Exclusive treatment from exclusive doctors**.
- Anova measuring mean difference between purpose of visit and service quality dimensions shows statistically significant between purpose of visit and assurance. Treatment achieved the higher level of perception.

6.2. SUGGESTIONS

Some of the patients felt discomfort in utilizing services provided by the hospitals such as waiting for attendants to assist patients that have significant effect on tangibility services. There is need to improve these aspects to satisfy the patients. Hence, physical aspects based on tangibility needed significant improvement which may also contribute to motivate the cancer patients to uninterruptedly access the hospitals for their treatment, which means, the physical aspects such as cleanliness of reception area, bathroom, washroom, restroom, etc. shall be maintained with maximum hygiene that may help the patients feel psychologically comfortable accessing the hospital for treatment.

6.3. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that majority of the cancer patients are satisfied with the service quality provided by the Lakeshore and Welcare hospitals, however, patients expects more maintenance and also improvement in the physical facilities that can further inspire their psychological wellbeing through physical comfort. Any illness can de-motivate the human being and critical disease like cancer can definitely put them into depressive state of mind. Majority of the patients are women who come down for breast cancer treatment.

It is recommended that, timeliness for the patients under treatment is considered more important though the institutions exhibited professionalism there are some mismatch in the observation during survey also verbal communication about long duration taken to attend the patients, delayed attention by the staff nurses also time taken by the hospital administration during discharge are some marginal defects reported by the patients which can be comfortably taken care by the hospitals running with professional settings. Both hospitals provide equal quality of service, however, patients have difference of opinion with respect to cost and utilization of services which does not have major implications to address.

The management shall consider contributed suggestions during policy implications and the study concludes that the patients perceived about the services provided by Lakeshore and Welcare hospitals leads to expected level of satisfaction.

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