Predictors of Patient Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

Background: Patient satisfaction is a multi-factorial concept. Diverse variables are used to analyze patient attitude, positive or negative, about the hospital services. Patient satisfaction is basically a match of expectations with experiences of the patient during a treatment process. The main objective of this study was to determine the satisfaction of the admitted patients about care in public sector hospitals.

Material & Methods: This study measures the changes brought in the patient satisfaction of admitted patients in different wards in public sector hospital in district D.I.Khan. Primary data was collected through survey approach with systematic random sampling from 176 patients. A structured questionnaire was extracted from the literature.

Results: Males were 55 and females 121. Twenty-eight patients were younger than 20 years whereas 21-40 years and 41 years or more were 82 and 66 respectively. Urbans were 73 and Rural 103. The results show that Patient satisfaction is determined by the predictors; Satisfaction from staff (p<0.001), Patient awareness (p=0.039) and Satisfaction from management (p=0.047) whereas there is no role of Satisfaction from treatment process and Satisfaction from environment.

Conclusion: Satisfaction from treatment process and environment are the problem points. It is recommended that the attributes falling under these two variables should be addressed.

KEY WORDS: Patient satisfaction, Patient awareness, Hospital.

INTRODUCTION

Patient satisfaction is a set of attitudes and perceptions of patients towards health services. It is the degree to which an individual regards health-care as useful, effective and beneficial. In other words it is the judgment of the patients about their needs and expectations met by the care provided, or an evaluation based on the fulfillment of expectations of the user. It is actually determined by the interplay of two factors i.e. patient expectations and experience of the real services. If the performance falls short of expectations, he is dissatisfied and if it matches the expectations, then vice versa. Patient satisfaction is therefore a match of expectations with experiences of the patient during a treatment process.

There are multiple reasons to study the concept of patient satisfaction. It is considered as an important outcome of the quality of healthcare. Getting views of the patients on the care services is a much realistic tool to evaluate and improve the health care services since it is based on direct experiences of the users. The rising strength of consumerism and quality consciousness in the society with a shift from doctor-to-patient relationship to modern provider-client attitude has highlighted the importance of recording patient views on healthcare delivery.

Patient satisfaction results in enhanced compliance of the patients to the medical regimens, appropriate use of medical resources and quick recovery from illness. Besides, evaluation by the patients makes medical staff aware about their shortcomings. The employees understand that they will be held accountable to the patients as well as administration. As a result care providers tend to acknowledge patient rights and involve them in treatment decisions. Patients' suggestions also help policy makers and planners to identify bottlenecks in the system, thereby introducing customized improvements in the services.

Patient satisfaction has been an area of special interest for researchers involved in health system research for almost half a century. Countless number of studies on this important topic has been published since then. Its importance increases further as contemporary consumers are more aware due to advancements in information tech-
nology. Their expectations from health organizations have increased and priorities changed. However, today’s doctor being more dependent on technology is losing the skill of understanding the emotions and perceptions of his patients. This is creating a gap between what patients want and what doctors perceive as important. It is imperative as well as quite rational to periodically undertake surveys in healthcare facilities, as often as possible.

Patient perceptions are influenced by sociocultural background of patients, their beliefs, attitudes and level of understanding. Successful outcome depends on how far the doctor understands these expectations and social context of his or her illness. Research findings from developed world simply don’t apply in the setup of developing countries including Pakistan. Patient satisfaction research in advanced as well as developing countries has many common and some unique variables and attributes. Besides a huge body of research involving both the qualitative and quantitative tools & techniques is going on all over the world. Research in Pakistan context is mostly about tackling primary & basic level issues of health service delivery. While in advanced countries, the delicacies and sophistications of health care delivery are under discussion.

In Pakistan majority of patient satisfaction studies in public sector hospitals focus on casualty or out-patient departments (OPD) with little work on admitted patients. Studies from other parts of the country cannot be used as reference in this district due to the wide-ranging cultural context.

The main objective of this study was to determine the satisfaction of the admitted patients about care in public sector hospitals.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Survey approach, being the excellent vehicle for measuring attitudes and orientations in a large population, was adopted in this study. Literature review was undertaken using different databases, to develop questions in the structured questionnaire keeping in view the study objectives. An initial version of the questionnaire was created, which was evaluated in a pilot study and an amended questionnaire was prepared. The final questionnaire included 40 questions belonging to six domains: Satisfaction from Staff, Satisfaction from Treatment process, Satisfaction from Environment, Satisfaction from Management, Patient Awareness and Overall Satisfaction. Seven questions were related to demographic information of the respondents. The 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the responses. The mean scores for each domain were calculated by adding the answers to all the items and dividing them by the number of questions in that particular domain.

Pilot study was done to determine the sample size as well as to define the population of interest since limited local data is available on the topic in this area. The population of this study consisted of all the admitted patients of DHQ Teaching Hospital D.I.Khan. Systematic random sampling was carried out till the required sample size of 176 respondents was completed. District Head Quarter Teaching Hospital is a tertiary care teaching hospital with 350 beds, operated by health department, providing clinical teaching and training facilities to undergraduate medical students, nursing and other allied faculties. Sampling frame included all admitted patients during the time of data collection i.e. March 1, 2011 to May 31, 2011. Structured questionnaire was administered by the trained interviewer who was a local resident and not an employee of any medical institution to minimize the bias. Study design was cross-sectional. Inclusion criteria was all the adult admitted patients of both sexes, admitted for at least two days. Exclusion criteria was all those who were not able to give their views due to seriousness of their condition or other reasons. Verbal informed consent was taken from the study participants. Assurance regarding confidentiality was provided.

Validity of instrument and data (Questionnaire) was checked through a statistical procedure, Cronbach Alpha. The alpha score of 33 items was 0.89 which was far beyond the required threshold of 0.70 in social sciences.

Following is the theoretical construction of the facts related to patient satisfaction study.
Predictors of patient satisfaction

RESULTS

The primary results of this study include the descriptive statistics on research variables and results of multiple regression analysis.

Stepwise regression has produced three models where third one is the ‘Best Fit’ as it explains 28.5% \( (R^2=0.285) \) of the variation in the dependent variable. The results show that Patient satisfaction is determined by the predictors SFS \( (p<0.001) \), PA \( (p=0.039) \) and SFM \( (p=0.047) \) whereas there is no role of SFT and SFE in the regression model hence excluded.

DISCUSSION

The literature reveals opposing patient views on the variables of patient satisfaction. The variables explored in our research are discussed as follows: The different attributes of patient satisfaction from the staff are; attitude, communication skills, technical skills and responsiveness to patient needs. The results of our study showed that satisfaction from staff was the most significant determinant of overall satisfaction. According to some studies, the majority of patients were satisfied with the attitude and communication skills of the care providers.\(^2\)\(^1\),\(^3\)^\(^1\) Good doctor–patient relationship was important for patient satisfaction.\(^2\)\(^2\) Respect & politeness, communication skills and technical competence were strong predictors of patient satisfaction.\(^1\)\(^1\) Whereas on the contrary the study by Khan\(^3\)^\(^5\) showed that most patients did not like the behavior of nurses and had negative experience as they observed the nurses were not attentive to their needs. In other similar studies patients were complaining about the lack of courtesy by the staff.\(^2\)\(^6\),\(^3\)^\(^6\) The results of our study are in line with the former studies, since satisfaction with the staff emerges as the most significant determinant of the overall satisfaction.

The different attributes of patient satisfaction from treatment process are; privacy, waiting time, consultation time, continuity of care, medicines and investigations. The results of our study showed that this variable had got almost negligible role in overall satisfaction. According to some studies, satisfaction with the provider’s respect for privacy, waiting time and consultation time were strong determinants of patient satisfaction.\(^3\)^\(^1\) Majority of the patients were satisfied with the continuity of care provided and drugs prescribed.\(^2\)\(^1\),\(^3\)^\(^6\),\(^5\)^\(^8\) Whereas other studies showed opposite results such as patients complaining of long waiting time, short consultation time, lack of privacy, non-availability of prescribed drugs and laboratory investigations.\(^1\)^\(^5\),\(^5\)^\(^7\) The results of this study are in line with the latter group of studies, as the variable satisfaction with the treatment process has got almost negligible role in overall satisfaction.

The different attributes of satisfaction from environment are: comfortable environment, cleanliness, facilities & services, building and convenient location of the hospital. According to some studies, the patients were satisfied with the cleanliness of the hospital\(^2\)\(^1\) and waiting area conditions.\(^5\)^\(^7\) Whereas on the contrary other studies showed that the worst aspect was cleanliness of the wards.\(^1\)\(^5\) The results of the present study are in support of the former viewpoints as satisfaction from environment emerges as the determinant.

The different attributes of satisfaction from management are; discipline, cost of treatment, availability of doctors, duration of service hours and location of wards. According to some studies, the patients had good experience from availability of doctors in wards and good convenience from duration of service hours.\(^1\)^\(^3\),\(^4\),\(^5\)^\(^7\),\(^5\)^\(^8\) Whereas other studies showed opposite results regarding the same attributes.\(^2\)\(^6\),\(^2\)^\(^7\) Inconvenient timings were responsible for more preference for private clinics over public hospitals\(^9\) and high cost was a problem, where majority of the patients expected to pay less.\(^1\)\(^5\),\(^4\)^\(^2\) Our study supports the former group of studies as the variable ‘Satisfaction from management’ has emerged as the predictor.

Table 1: Descriptive Data on Research Variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Minimum score</th>
<th>Maximum score</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction from staff</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction from treatment process</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction from environment</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction from management</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient awareness</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall satisfaction</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>4.0237</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
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</table>
The different attributes of the variable patient awareness are previous experience of the hospitals, information about diseases and awareness about the rights as a patient. According to some studies, there was association between previous experience and satisfaction and majority of patients were aware of their rights. Whereas contrary results were given by other studies; most of the patients were unaware of their diagnosis, causes of their disease, number of medications they were taking, lack of knowledge about their prescribed medication, why they were taking those medications and were incapable of understanding their test results. The results of my research support the former view as patient awareness has emerged as the predictor.

Overall satisfaction was high in this study; a result which is in line with studies conducted by different authors who show higher levels of overall patient satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

Satisfaction from staff, patient awareness and satisfaction from management are the predictors of patient satisfaction. The role of satisfaction from treatment process and satisfaction from environment is either below nominal performance or totally missing from all the models of regression. Hence both are the problem points.

It is recommended that the attributes falling under satisfaction from treatment process like waiting time, consultation time, privacy, continuity of care, medicines and investigations should be addressed. Similarly the attributes falling under satisfaction from environment like comfortable environment, facilities and services, building, convenient location of the hospital and cleanliness should also be addressed.

REFERENCES


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