A STUDY ON SERVICE QUALITY GAP IN MULTI-SPECIALITY HOSPITALS

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ABSTRACT *Service quality is a crucial direction for enhancing business performance, which underlies the widespread adoption of quality improvement initiatives in many service industries. In recent years, one of the fastest growing industries in the service sector is the health care industry. The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of the SERVQUAL factors, which determine consumers' perceptions and expectations of service quality in Multispecialty hospitals. Questionnaire was administered to 250 patients of Multi-speciality hospitals. Findings shows that service quality level of this hospital in multi speciality hospitals is good. Overall, patients' perception is slightly higher than patients' expectation; however, the gap between perception and expectation is not significantly different. The highest service quality dimension of patients' expectation is tangibility. The highest service quality dimension of patients' perception is also tangibility. The key finding also indicates that tangibility, reliability and responsiveness are the three most important dimensions of hospital service quality perceived by patients; whereas the empathy was found having the largest negative gap.*

Introduction

Service quality becomes increasingly important for today's business, particularly in high-customer involvement industries such as healthcare and financial services. Service quality is a crucial direction for enhancing business performance, which underlies the widespread adoption of quality improvement initiatives in many service industries. In recent years, one of the fastest growing industries in the service sector is the health care industry. Healthcare is a patient oriented service industry where the patient or the service users is in focus and patient service is the differentiated factor. Success and survival of healthcare organisation depends upon the effectiveness and efficiency of the services rendered to its patients. Patients' satisfaction is the key to secure patient retention/loyalty and to generate superior and long-term performance or optimize long-term value. This patient perception is based on their expectations and perceived in the services offered by the healthcare industry. The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of the SERVQUAL factors, which determine consumers' perceptions and expectations of service quality in Multispecialty hospitals.

Statement of problem

Health care is a rapidly growing sector which has gained much attention from researchers and practitioners worldwide. Due to tremendously increasing cost, many hospitals attempt to adopt quality initiatives such as lean and/or Six Sigma to improve their service operations. Implementing such process improvement efficiently and effectively would ultimately help in delivering the highest value to customers. In a globally competitive world, hospitals that can successfully implement an appropriate business process improvement tend to gain a significant competitive advantage. This leads to questions related to 'what' and 'how' quality initiatives should be implemented to improve the overall service quality and customer satisfaction. Hence it becomes vital that the organization understand the way in which quality initiatives help enhance all dimensions of service quality. This calls for empirical research to provide a greater understanding of service quality dimensions which matches the patients expectation and perceptions.

Review of literature

Prattana et al.(2012), measured the service quality of the hospital implementing Lean management. The paper assessed patients' expectation and satisfaction pertaining to hospital service quality. Data collected from 450 patients are analyzed by using the SERVQUAL model. The model compared patients' perception and expectation of service received across five dimensions of service quality including reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibility. The results of this study reveal that overall service quality score is positive, however, there is no significant different between overall patients' perception and expectation. The service quality level of the hospital implementing lean is moderate; the hospital is able to deliver service as expected. In addition, the largest positive gap between patients' perception and expectation is in term of tangibility. The largest negative gap is with respect to assurance.

Rao et al. (2006), studied the use of 16-item scale having good reliability and validity. Patient perceptions of quality at public health facilities are slightly better than neutral. Multivariate regression analysis results indicate that for outpatients, doctor behavior has the largest effect on general patient satisfaction followed by medicine availability, hospital infrastructure, staff behavior, and medical information. For in-patients, staff behavior has the largest effect followed by doctor behavior, medicine availability, medical information, and hospital infrastructure.

Çaha (2007), indicates that patient's perception towards the private hospitals was more due to believe that they provide qualitative health service. But large number of patients complains about services given by private hospitals. The complaints are mainly about the length of the time that they wait for treatment and the consultation time given to them. The lack of physical and human capacities of these hospitals seems to be the main reasons behind the quality of their service.

Research methodology
- **Data**- Primary data was used
- **Data collection**- Questionnaire is distributed among the patients of multi-specialty hospitals
- **Sample**- 250 patients
- **Sampling Technique**- Convenience Sampling method was adopted to collect the Questionnaire
- **Period of study**- April 2016 to September 2016

Statistical Analysis

The SERVQUAL scale was used to evaluate hospital service. The obtained data were analyzed with SPSS for Window 17.0 software. Data were tested by using statistical inference; the

paired t-test was conducted to determine whether there were differences between the overall score. The SERVQUAL score was calculated to evaluate perceived service and expected service with respect to the following measures: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The SERVQUAL scores of each service dimension were obtained by calculating the difference between the perceived and expected service scores.

SERVQUAL score = Perception score – Expectation score

The positive scores mean that patients' expectations have met and their perceptions of hospital services are good. The negative scores indicate that patients' expectations have not been met and their perceptions of hospital services are poor.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1 results show that patients' perception are higher than patients' expectation in four dimensions implying that the hospital delivered service more than their expectation. Incase of empathy dimension, patients expectation is higher than perception stating that the hospital delivers good service which is more than patients expectation. Data are tested with the paired t-test to examine the hypothesis that z values of all the dimensions fell in the critical region (2 tailed sig.).

Table 2 depicts service quality gap for each dimension, which is an indicator for service deficiency. The statistical results also indicate that the current service quality level in term of tangibility, reliability and responsiveness is high whereas the service quality of the empathy dimension is low. The service quality with regard to assurance is considered to be at moderate level. To gain more insight, the gap between perception and expectation was analyzed; results show that the largest gap between patients' perception and patients' expectation is in term of tangibility; the gap is significantly different. This means that hospital considerably delivered good service in term of tangibility, reliability and responsiveness more than expected. On the contrary, results reported the negative gap in terms of empathy. Particularly, patients significantly had higher expectation than perception in term of empathy.

This provides an important implication for top management in paying attention to this negative gaps with an aim of improving the quality of service delivered to patients, particularly the empathy dimension. Also, these information help management team make a decision regarding the best use of hospital resources in delivering the highly valued service. It is noted that the statistical result is an initial guideline that help identify the potential service quality improvement areas. Further investigation is, however, suggested to provide management team with constructive information in selecting an appropriate improvement initiative.

Conclusion

This paper measures service quality of multi-speciality hospital by using the SERVQUAL model. Findings shows that service quality level of this hospital in multi speciality hospitals is good. Overall, patients' perception is slightly higher than patients' expectation; however, the gap between perception and expectation is not significantly different. The highest service quality dimension of patients' expectation is tangibility. The highest service quality dimension of patients' perception is also tangibility. The key finding also indicates that tangibility, reliability and responsiveness are the three most important dimensions of hospital service quality perceived by patients; whereas the empathy was found having the largest negative gap. In summary, this study helps identify the quality of service provided by the multi-speciality hospital as an improvement initiative. The results provide a managerial implication in continuously improving the service quality thereby enhancing customer satisfaction

Table 1 Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Tangibility	Perception	25.4000	250	2.01401	.12738
	Expectation	24.3000	250	1.00700	.06369
Reliability	Perception	20.9000	250	1.70341	.10773
	Expectation	19.3000	250	2.65295	.16779
Responsiveness	Perception	21.6000	250	1.35919	.08596
	Expectation	15.8000	250	2.89717	.18323
Assurance	Perception	17.2000	250	1.16853	.07390
	Expectation	17.1000	250	1.30261	.08238
Empathy	Perception	13.0000	250	2.19529	.13884
	Expectation	15.6000	250	1.68861	.10680

Table 2 Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Tangibility (P-E)	1.10000	2.43180	.15380	.79708	1.40292	7.152	249	.000**
Reliability (P-E)	1.60000	2.01401	.12738	1.34913	1.85087	12.561	249	.000**
Responsiveness (P-E)	5.80000	3.71689	.23508	5.33701	6.26299	24.673	249	.000**
Assurance (P-E)	.10000	1.30261	.08238	-.06226	.26226	1.214	249	.226
Empathy (P-E)	-2.60000	2.87630	.18191	-2.95828	-2.24172	-14.293	249	.000*

** High & * Low

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