



NAVIGATING COMPLEXITIES OF GERIATRIC CARE: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS IN HOSPITAL SETTINGS

Hospital Administration

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ABSTRACT

The growing elderly population presents significant challenges in hospital-based healthcare. Ageing patients often face physical limitations, cognitive decline, and accessibility barriers that hinder their ability to receive adequate medical attention. This study explores the difficulties encountered by geriatric patients, assesses hospital facilities, and suggests practical strategies to make hospitals more elder-friendly. Conducted in a 1082-bed tertiary care teaching hospital, data collection involved structured interviews with 110 elderly patients and hospital staff, observational visits, and infrastructure assessments. The findings highlight major barriers in accessibility, signage, hospital design, and patient safety. Recommendations include architectural improvements, staff training, and policy changes to enhance geriatric care quality, ensuring safer and more comfortable hospital environments for aging populations [1-3].

KEYWORDS

INTRODUCTION

The world is experiencing a demographic shift with a rapidly increasing aging population. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), by 2050, the proportion of people aged 60 years and above is expected to nearly double [4]. This demographic transition presents substantial challenges for hospital infrastructure, staffing, and healthcare policies [5].

Elderly patients often experience reduced mobility, visual and hearing impairments, and cognitive disorders, which complicate their hospital experiences. Studies indicate that poorly designed healthcare environments contribute to increased stress, delayed recovery, and higher fall rates among geriatric patients [6,7].

The National Program for Healthcare of the Elderly (NPHCE) emphasizes the need for hospitals to adopt elder-friendly environments to ensure safety and faster recovery [8]. However, many healthcare institutions, including the Armed Forces Medical Services (AFMS), lack dedicated geriatric units [9]. This study aims to identify key challenges faced by elderly patients and propose practical solutions for a more inclusive and accessible hospital environment.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted over a period of **90 days** in a tertiary care teaching hospital with 1082 beds. The study focused on assessing the hospital environment, accessibility, infrastructure, and quality of care provided to geriatric patients.

Study Population

The study population included geriatric patients aged 60 years and above who attended outpatient departments (OPDs).

Inclusion Criteria

- Elderly patients aged 60 years and above
- Patients willing to participate in the study
- Patients capable of responding to the questionnaire or assisted by caregivers
- Exclusion Criteria**
- Patients with severe cognitive impairment unable to provide consent or respond to questions
- Patients with terminal illnesses receiving palliative care

Data Collection Methods

- Structured interviews** with 110 elderly patients

- Staff interviews** with faculty, residents, nurses, and nursing assistants
- Observational visits** using checklists from:
 - ✓ National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE) [10]
 - ✓ International Health Facility Guidelines (Australia) [11]
 - ✓ Elder-friendly Design Guidelines (Singapore) [12]
- Thematic analysis of qualitative data
- Mini-Mental State Examination (MMSE) to assess cognitive function and risk of delirium [13]

Data Analysis

- Descriptive statistics** were used to analyze survey responses and observational data.
- Thematic analysis** was applied to qualitative responses from interviews.
- Comparisons were made with national and international guidelines** to identify gaps in geriatric care.

Limitations of the Study

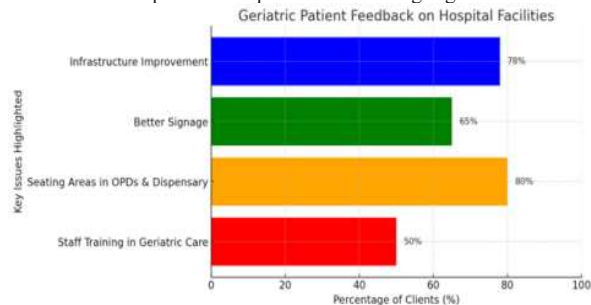
- Short study duration (90 days)** limited the ability to capture seasonal variations in hospital accessibility.
- Single-center study**, making findings less generalizable to other hospitals.
- Exclusion of critically ill and cognitively impaired patients** may have led to an incomplete understanding of geriatric care challenges.
- Self-reported data** from patients and caregivers might include recall bias.

Findings and Results The study revealed several critical challenges that significantly impact the healthcare experiences of elderly patients:

- Infrastructure Barriers:** Many hospital facilities are not designed with elderly patients in mind. Issues such as narrow doorways, heavy doors, steep ramps, poor flooring, and inadequate lighting create difficulties in movement, increasing the risk of falls and injuries [14].
- Signage and Navigation Issues:** A common issue faced by geriatric patients is difficulty navigating hospital premises. Many hospitals lack clear, high-contrast signage, making it hard for visually impaired patients to find their way. The absence of multilingual signage also poses challenges for patients from diverse linguistic backgrounds [15].
- Accessibility Constraints:** Insufficient parking spaces, lack of

designated seating areas, inaccessible restrooms, and poorly designed lifts hinder mobility. Many elderly patients rely on wheelchairs and walkers, which are difficult to manoeuvre in congested and poorly designed hospital layouts [16].

4. **Safety Concerns:** The risk of falls is a major concern for geriatric patients. Poorly maintained flooring, lack of grab bars in bathrooms, absence of handrails on staircases, and improper lighting contribute to fall-related injuries [17].
5. **Lack of Geriatric-Specific Assistance:** Many hospitals do not have dedicated staff or volunteers to assist elderly patients. Long wait times, lack of emotional support, and inadequate training of hospital staff in geriatric care further add to patient discomfort [18].
6. **Percentage-Wise Feedback from the Questionnaire**
 - 78% of clients felt infrastructure needed improvement
 - 65% highlighted the need for better signage
 - 80% emphasized the need for seating areas in OPDs and dispensary
 - 50% felt hospital staff required more training in geriatric care



Recommendations To improve hospital care for elderly patients, the following solutions are proposed:

1. **Architectural Improvements:**
 - o Widen doorways to accommodate wheelchairs and walking aids.
 - o Install slip-resistant flooring and ensure even surfaces to prevent falls.
 - o Ensure restrooms have grab bars, non-slip mats, and easy-to-use fixtures.
 - o Provide properly designed ramps with double-height handrails for additional support [19].
2. **Better Signage and Navigation Support:**
 - o Use high-contrast, large-font signage with simple, easy-to-understand symbols.
 - o Install bilingual/multilingual information boards to cater to diverse patient populations.
 - o Ensure wayfinding features such as floor markings, digital screens, and audio announcements to guide elderly patients [20].
3. **Enhanced Safety Measures:**
 - o Install handrails along hospital corridors and staircases.
 - o Implement fall-prevention protocols, including risk assessment for all elderly patients upon hospital admission.
 - o Ensure adequate lighting in all hospital areas, particularly in hallways, staircases, and waiting rooms [21].
4. **Improved Accessibility and Comfort:**
 - o Allocate designated accessible parking spaces near hospital entrances.
 - o Install elevators with voice announcements, larger display panels, and sufficient seating in waiting areas.
 - o Provide comfortable, height-appropriate chairs with armrests in waiting areas to assist elderly patients in standing and sitting [22].
5. **Geriatric Support Programs:**
 - o Establish "May I Help You" desks to assist elderly patients in navigating the hospital.
 - o Implement a Friendly Companion Program with trained volunteers to provide emotional and physical assistance.
 - o Introduce specialized training for healthcare providers to enhance their understanding of geriatric care needs [23].

Policy Recommendations Beyond physical infrastructure modifications, there is a need for healthcare policies that prioritize geriatric care:

Aim of Elder Friendly Hospital

- Promote excellence in hospital care for ill older adults through evidence based service delivery
- Ensure gerontological principles are incorporated in practice standards
- Create a built in environment that promotes, protects and maintains safe maximum independent function
- Mandatory geriatric care training: Hospitals should incorporate geriatric sensitivity training into staff orientation programs [24].
- Elder-friendly accreditation: Healthcare institutions should be evaluated for compliance with elder-friendly infrastructure and service delivery standards [25].
- Government support and funding: Increased funding should be allocated to improve geriatric services and integrate specialized care programs into hospitals [26].



CONCLUSION

With the global aging population on the rise, hospitals must proactively adapt their infrastructure and healthcare delivery models to meet the needs of elderly patients. The findings of this study highlight significant gaps in hospital design, accessibility, and patient assistance. Implementing recommended architectural changes, safety enhancements, and policy reforms can significantly improve the hospital experience for older adults, ensuring dignity, safety, and quality of care.

Future research should examine the long-term impact of these changes and explore innovative approaches to enhance geriatric healthcare services in hospital settings.

- **Ensuring that older patients are properly considered for their risk of falls** – often, simple and early risk assessments and safeguards are all it takes to prevent falls and avoid the devastating loss that our client suffered.
- **The concept of "Life Enhancing Architecture" and a user-centered design approach is the need of the hour.**

Structured Interview Questionnaire

1. **Demographic Details:**
 - o Age
 - o Gender
 - o Education level
 - o Living arrangement (Alone/With family/Assisted living)
2. **Hospital Experience:**
 - o How often do you visit the hospital? Once a week/once a month/once in 3 months
 - o What are your primary reasons for visiting the hospital? Routine Check-up/Renewal of medicines/Chronic Illness
 - o How would you rate your overall experience? (Excellent/Good/Fair/Poor)
3. **Infrastructure and Accessibility:**
 - o Do you face difficulty navigating the hospital? (Yes/No)
 - o Are hospital signages clear and readable? (Yes/No)
 - o Do you feel comfortable using the seating areas? (Yes/No)
4. **Safety and Assistance:**

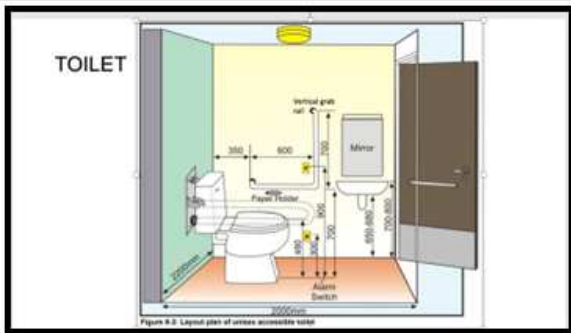
- o Have you ever experienced a fall within the hospital premises? (Yes/No)
- o Do you feel safe while moving around the hospital? (Yes/No)
- o Is assistance readily available when required? (Yes/No)

5. Recommendations:

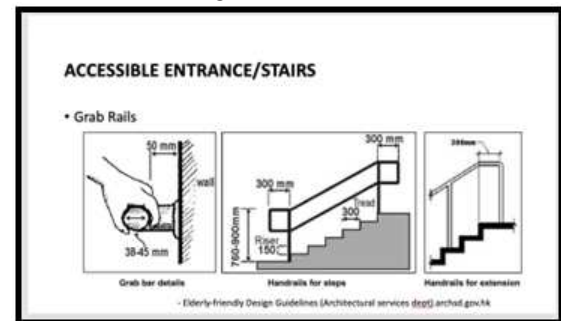
- o What improvements would you suggest for better geriatric care?
- o Any additional comments or concerns?



ACCESSIBLE CORRIDOR



Barrier-free environment guidelines, India



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