



Predictors of patient satisfaction with quality of health care in Asian hospitals.

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REVIEW

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Abstract

Background

Hospitals in Asia recognize the importance of delivering patient satisfaction as a strategic variable and a crucial determinant of long-term viability and success. The aim of this review is to identify the factors that determine patient satisfaction in Asian Hospitals.

Methods

This review presents issues arising from over 33 patient satisfaction surveys conducted in Asia. Patient satisfaction was analysed according to the literature on service related factors, demographic and psychosocial variables. Studies that were analysed were commonly cross sectional studies and data had been collected via interviewer administered and self administered questionnaires.

Results

Demographic factors such as age, gender, education level and socio-economic status have an effect on patient satisfaction regarding quality of health care. The effect was not equally observed in all countries in Asia. Health provider related factors such as type of hospital, technical and physical facilities and quality of health professional-patient relationship also change patients' satisfaction. As similar to previous observation, their effects on satisfaction varied from country to country.

Conclusion

The effect of various predictive factors of patient satisfaction on the quality of health care differs from one country to another. Knowing patient characteristics which govern satisfaction regarding health care, can be effectively utilized by one country, to modify their own health system and increase patient satisfaction.

Key Words

Quality of Patient Care, Asian Hospitals

Background

Continuous quality improvement is linked to the use of timely and useful feedback from clients. Patients constitute the hospital's direct clientele. The overall satisfaction is an important aspect of the service itself and it is considered to be an important outcome measure for health services. Patient care is not considered to be high quality unless the patient is satisfied.

Hospitals in Asia recognize the importance of delivering patient satisfaction as a strategic variable and an important predictor of long-term viability and success. Knowing the predictors of patient satisfaction by each country in Asia is therefore important to improve the quality of care provided to patients and to utilize the limited health resources in effective paths.

In addition, patient satisfaction has been identified to influence health related behaviours, hence it is of significant importance to understand its key determinants.

The theoretical model on patient satisfaction is as below.

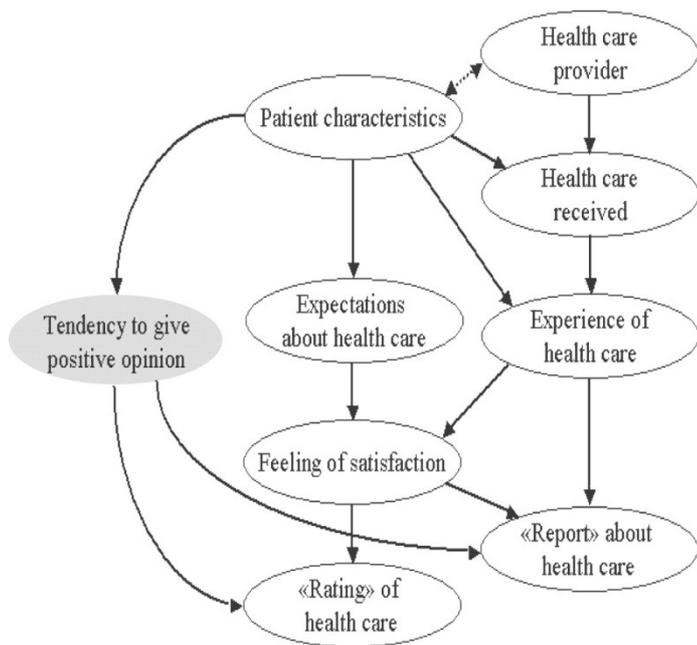


Chart 1-Theoretical model on patient satisfaction

(1) Adjustment for patient characteristics in satisfaction surveys, International Journal for Quality in Health Care, 16 (6), 433-435.

Ever since the first satisfaction studies of the 1960s(2) there has been a proliferation of research on the subject with an estimated 15,000 academic and trade articles published on consumer satisfaction during the past two decades alone(3).The information on the total number of patient satisfaction surveys carried out in Asia is limited.

The health sector occupies an enormously important position in ensuring sustainable overall socio-economic advancement in all Asian countries. Inadequacies in the health sector lead to a vicious cycle of ill health and poverty. Therefore it important to receive regular feedbacks from the patients’ point of view to modify the quality of current health service in each Asian country.

The ability to satisfy patients is vital for many reasons. It is mainly helpful for hospitals to establish a patient oriented quality health service rather than focusing only on the patient’s disease. Improvement in the service quality involuntarily uplifts the reputation gained by the health care institution. Patient satisfaction is also a valuable competitive tool, to increase staff motivation. Recent research has shown that service satisfaction can significantly enhance patients’ quality of life (4).

Further awareness among medical practitioners on the effect of patient characteristics over patient satisfaction will enable provision of a patient oriented health care, satisfying both the health care provider and the patient. It will help strengthen patients’ trust and confidence on the health care professional.

Methodology (Search strategy, selection criteria, Data collection and analysis)

As data on the total number of patient satisfaction surveys carried out in Asia was not available, online data bases were searched using “Quality of care” and “patient satisfaction survey “as key words with Google scholar. All articles that had been published on line regarding patient satisfaction in Asian countries were selected.

In selecting surveys, literature was searched from countries to represent all parts of Asia (South, South East, North/Central, East, West /Middle East).

A total of 33 patient satisfaction surveys including the studies carried out in Sri Lanka(5-7), India(11-13), Bangladesh(8) , Pakistan(9,10), Thailand (14), , Saudi Arabia(15), Maldives(16), Afghanistan(17), Japan(18), Iran(19), Qatar(20), Bhutan(21), Jordan(22), South Korea(23,24), Taiwan(25), Kuwait(26), United Arab Emirates (27), Israel(28) and Indonesia(29) ,China(30), Singapore(31) ,Malaysia(32) were considered for the review .

The research method that had been used was mainly cross sectional studies .All had been performed using either interviewer administered questionnaires or self administered questionnaires. The SERVQUAL quality framework was the most popular tool used in Data Collection (8, 9). SERVQUAL is a measure of Quality, developed in the mid eighties, which assesses the aspects of Reliability, Assurance, Tangibles, Empathy and Responsiveness. Another questionnaire used was the validated patient satisfaction scale by the picker institute (10). The picker institute questionnaire, which had been developed in the USA, consists of 51 Items. Others were focussed on tools developed and validated by the respective authors of the research studies.

The common aspects of health care that had been assessed were Accessibility and Convenience, Information and Communication, empathy, Cleanliness, Satisfaction with Food, nursing care and hospital environment.

Results

Overall satisfaction

The overall satisfaction levels were remarkably high in Asian countries with the exception of China.

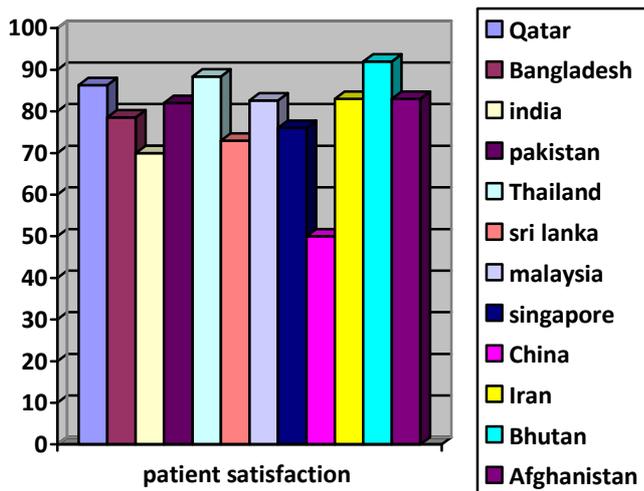


Chart 2-Variation in patient satisfaction levels in Asian Hospitals.

1. Age

In almost all the studies, age did not have an effect on the level of patient satisfaction (24). However a patient satisfaction study to assess hospital services in Kuwait concluded age as the most important determinant for overall satisfaction (26). The studies in Sri Lanka (6, 7) stated that the satisfaction level was significantly low for the age group 21-50years while a study in China (30) has concluded that increasing age had been a negative predictor of patient satisfaction.

2. Gender

Gender was found to be an influencing factor in studies conducted in Israel and Saudi Arabia. In Israel, higher level of satisfaction was demonstrated among males (28) with respect to females. In contrast, females had a significantly higher satisfaction rates in Saudi Arabia (15). No such significant relationship was observed in surveys conducted in other countries.

3. Education level

Patients having had tertiary education were shown to have significantly lower levels of satisfaction in a study conducted in United Arab Emirates (27) and Saudi Arabia (15). Other studies uniformly showed no such relationship.

4. Socio-economic status

Patients from lower socio economic groups had higher satisfaction levels. (7, 17) Other studies did not show a similar association.

5. Type of Hospital

A higher satisfaction level was associated with hospitals at a level lower than district or provincial hospitals. Patients who were admitted to urban hospitals were more satisfied in studies conducted in Sri Lanka (5), China (17) and United Arab Emirates (27).

6. Quality of health professional-patient relationship

Quality of communication and interpersonal skills had been the key factor for patient satisfaction in several surveys, specially the studies conducted in Saudi Arabia (15), Maldives (16), Afghanistan (17), Japan (18), Bhutan (21) and Taiwan (25).

7. Type of service involved

Service from the physician had been a more powerful indicator of patient satisfaction in majority of studies. (24) However, in one study patients were more satisfied with nursing care over the duties of physicians. (20)

8. Technical and physical facilities

Technical competence and physical infra-structure was a more influential predictor for recommendation for patients rather than being predictive of patient satisfaction. (25) However, in one study (20) technical competence was ranked higher than interpersonal skills.

9. Patients' expectations

Patients with lower expectations had higher satisfaction rates. (22)

Discussion

In this study, it was evident that demographic factors such as age, gender, education level and socio-economic status can have an effect on patient satisfaction regarding quality of health care. However, the effect is not equally observed in all countries in Asia. Cultural factors, patients' previous experiences regarding health care and expectations may account for this variability.

Health provider related factors such as type of hospital, technical and physical facilities and quality of health professional-patient relationship can change patients' satisfaction. As similar to previous observation, their effects on satisfaction may vary from country to country.

Therefore, it is important to identify the patient and health provider related predictive factors of patient satisfaction by each country to modify their quality of health care delivery systems.

The reasons for observing a higher satisfaction in urban hospitals in some countries may be secondary to having better trained staff, well equipped technical facilities, and reputation of the institutions over other hospitals.

Further to achieve higher satisfaction levels, the quality of service needs to greater .But in certain countries of Asia, the health professionals are paid less than other countries, which in turn may be a cause for de motivation to providing a quality service leading overall lower satisfaction levels.



In today's highly competitive healthcare environment, hospitals increasingly realize the need to focus on service quality as a means to improve their competitive position. Patient-based determinants and perceptions of service quality therefore play an important role when choosing a hospital. (33) It will help to gain patients' trust on the health care institution as well as to motivate the staff health care workers of the institution for a better patient care.

Further, hospital managers and staff need to be encouraged in using Patient Satisfaction Survey (PSS) results(34) in improving the quality of services in the hospitals (inculcate quality culture among the staff) rather than using it as an audit tool in evaluating the performance of the staff or hospitals.

Proper dissemination of information to the public about financial aspects is an area of concern. E.g. Information about payment system, and waivers etc., in hospitals would avoid confusion among the patients about fee and bribery /corruption in certain regions of Asia. (34)This may be certainly true for communities which have significantly higher levels of satisfaction for private sector health care. (35)

Training the health personnel in Interpersonal Skills & Communication is another area needs attention. It is more cost effective than developing technical facilities and more effective in improving patient satisfaction. Majority of patient satisfaction surveys support this observation and may be more appropriate to resource less countries.

Hospitals need more Patient Satisfaction Surveys at regular intervals, as the PSS subjective data supported with other objective data like hospital indicators would further help in improving quality of services in these hospitals. PSSs could be used as a tool by hospitals, for accountability to the public, in marketing hospitals and which in turn would help hospitals to be financially sustainable in the long run. (36)

In one satisfaction survey carried out in Asia, the most significant areas of dissatisfaction were financial aspects (36) and interpersonal aspects of care (29, 36). Content analysis revealed that the cause of dissatisfaction were poor availability or supply of drugs, poor utilities like water supply, lights and fans etc., and poor maintenance of toilets and lack of cleanliness. Therefore, they can be given a priority over improving large scale infra structure to benefit and satisfy more patients.

Majority of the countries of Asia are yet developing and financial constraints to improve the technical facilities, have to be accepted in certain regions of Asia.

In such a background careful analysis of the effect of determining factors on satisfaction and modification of the services to suit different health needs of demographic entities and service related factors plays a key role improving overall satisfaction and quality of care provided to the patients.

Conclusion

The effect of various predictive factors of patient satisfaction on the quality of health care differs from one country to another. Knowing patient characteristics which govern satisfaction regarding health care, can be effectively utilized by one country, to modify their own health system and increase patient satisfaction.

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PEER REVIEW

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

None