Original Article

Health Care Service

Health Care Service Quality: A Comparison of Public and Private Hospitals in Karachi

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of the study was to compare the levels of patient satisfaction with the health service quality between the public and private hospitals in Karachi, so that their gaps, if any, may be identified and incorporated in future programs and policies.

Study Design: Cross sectional comparative study

Place and Duration of Study: This study was conducted in one public and one private hospitals in Karachi from May 2013 to July 2013.

Materials and Methods: A random sample of 400 patients, 200 each from both public and private hospitals was drawn. Data was collected, on a pre-tested and pre coded questionnaire, and analyzed using SPSS version 16.0. level of satisfaction between patients in both the public and private health care settings were compared.

Results: The results of the study revealed that 75% of the patients availing health care services at the public hospital were not satisfied with the overall hygiene and cleanliness. 58.5% of the patients at public hospital were not involved in decision making regarding their own treatment. As for the patients availing services at the private hospital, 83.5% mentioned that they were provided with adequate privacy by their physician and hospital staff; however, 51% of the respondents replied that they had to pay huge medical bills which were beyond their affordability.

Conclusion: Significant difference was found in the patients' satisfaction level with the quality of health care services provided in the private and public hospitals, with private hospitals performing better in most of the aspects of health care service delivery.

Key words: Health-care Services, Patient Satisfaction, Quality of Services, Public and Private Hospitals, Karachi

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INTRODUCTION

It has been proved by research that unlike the quality of products, which can be assessed very conveniently, it remains a difficult task to define and measure quality of services, mainly because of its elusive and abstract nature[1]. In terms of health, the quality of health services may be explained as the application of appropriate procedures and technologies in such an efficient way that best possible balance is maintained between risks and benefits[2].Measuring the quality of services is highly dependent on patients' perceptions and expectations[3]. Quality in terms of health services may be technical, that is, provision of appropriate diagnostic and treatment procedures that expresses what exactly has been provided to the patient. However, this aspect of quality is difficult to judge by the patient. Whereas, functional quality of health services is expressed as how the service is provided to the beneficiary, who is hence well in the position to judge this aspect of the quality of the service[4].

In this rapidly changing and advancing world, patients are now better equipped with information regarding their ailments, available therapies, their side effects and success or failure of these treatment modalities. Although, utmost efforts are made to enhance universal accessibility to health care, the quality of the health care services is overlooked at all levels . In their efforts to be better than their competitors, hospitals are trying to deliver a wide range of services, but unfortunately the quality assurance of these services is neglected[5]. Patient satisfaction plays a pivotal role in ascertaining the quality of services. However, it is believed that patient satisfaction is influenced by their expectations and patients' satisfaction may not correspond to the level of treatment out come[6], and patients' perceptions about provision of quality service improves the reputation and profitability of the hospital[7].

In literature, most patient satisfaction surveys are dependent on patients' experience at a specific visit rather than overall experience extended over a

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particular length of time, and some researchers intentionally avoid to investigate about the quality of health care provided to them because it is believed that patient may not be in the position to judge the technicalities of their treatment modalities[8].

In Pakistan, the health system revolves around public and private health care providers. Majority of the public hospitals are located in major cities, but facilities provided by these hospitals are inadequate to fulfill the needs of even the urban dwellers[9]. Although, a number of researches have been conducted in Pakistan to quantitatively measure the patient satisfaction level in different cities of Pakistan[10,11], but not much literature is available to compare patient satisfaction level in public and private sector hospitals. One of the studies conducted in Lahore Pakistan revealed that private hospitals are focusing more on their development and providing maximum health care facilities to their customers [12.] A study in Greece[13] investigated the provision of health care service quality n public and private hospitals. Their findings with regards to the public hospitals were that the patients availing public health care facilities were more satisfied with the competence of physicians and nurses as compare to those visiting private hospitals. On the other hand, patients attending private hospitals were found to be more satisfied with physical facilities and infrastructure, waiting queue and admission procedures as compared to patients visiting public hospitals. In another study[14], comparing the health care services quality between public and private hospitals in UAE, significant differences were found between the two health care systems, with regards to reliability, empathy, tangibility, administrative responsiveness and supporting skills. In this study, public hospitals were found to be better in quality service provision than the private hospitals. Similar findings were encountered during another study[15] that compared the level of satisfaction between private and public health care users in different European countries. This study suggests that level of satisfaction is more in patients attending public health care facilities. However these studies are more representative of developed countries. One of the study[16] conducted in Lahore city of Pakistan, concluded that public hospitals nor deliver good quality services to their patients, neither are they making any serious effort to mend this gap.

This study was therefore conducted with the view to compare the level of patient satisfaction between public and private hospitals in Karachi, so that this information could be utilized to bridge the gap in performance between the two systems of health care delivery in Pakistan.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

It was a cross sectional comparative study, conducted in one public and one private hospitals in Karachi. The duration of the study was from April 2013 to October 2013. A total of 400 patients, over the age of 18 years, 200 each from public and private hospitals were included in the study through systematic random sampling. Only the patients admitted in the ward were included in the study so that they may inform us about not only the health care service provision at the out-patient departments, but also share their experience during their stay at the hospital wards. However, patients with critical illnesses, unconsciousness, unwillingness and psychiatric illnesses, those undergoing chemotherapy and those who were unable to communicate because of language barrier were excluded from the study. The major task during data collection was to develop a reliable and valid questionnaire, so that errors of response and bias can be minimized as much as possible. For this purpose, the internationally recognized and most popular instrument for the measurement of service quality , SERVQUAL, was consulted. Moreover, other patient satisfaction questionnaires were searched and modified accordingly to develop our own data collection instrument. The data collecting tool was pre-coded and pre-tested on 10% of the sample. Written informed consent was taken from each respondent prior to data collection and the purpose of study was properly explained along with assurance of maintenance of confidentiality. Data was entered and analyzed with SPSS version 16.0. Relative frequencies were calculated and cross tabs were run for individual analysis of private and government hospitals. Chi square test was used to compare the level of satisfaction between private and public hospitals.

RESULTS

A total of 400 patients, 200 each from government and private hospitals were included in the study through random sampling. The mean age of the sample in government hospital was found to be 36.5±14.18 years, where as that of the sample in private hospital was 34.5±11.90 years. Other demographic data are shown in table 1.

The mean waiting time in public hospital was found to be 88.56±20.14 minutes, which is significantly higher than that of waiting time in private hospital which was 62.51±32.45 minutes.

In government hospitals, about 75% of the respondents were not satisfied with the overall hygiene and cleanliness, whereas only 18% of the patients attending private hospital expressed their dissatisfaction with the hygienic conditions.

With regards to the involvement of the patients and their families in decision making about their treatment, 58.5% of the respondents in government hospitals complained that they have not been involved in decision making regarding their own health (fig.1).

Only 12% of the respondents, attending public hospital opined that they sometimes encounter good behavior

and satisfactory answers from nursing staff, whereas majority of the people visiting private hospitals felt more dignified, especially with respect to the good staff behavior.

Majority of the patients at the public hospital disclosed that they had difficulty in getting appointment from the doctor, where as 34% patients visiting private hospital encountered this problem, and they were more satisfied with their choice of physician. 51% of the respondents in private hospitals affirmed that they had to pay bills beyond their affordability.

Only 27% of the respondents, availing facilities at the public hospital mentioned that their physician explained adverse effects of the medicines to them, as compared to 47.5% of the patients visiting private hospital.

Concerning the issue of privacy and confidentiality, 83.5% of the patients availing services at the private hospital responded that they were satisfied with the privacy provided to them by their physician or other hospital staff, with regards to their health issues. (fig.2) Whereas only 7.5% of the respondents were provided with adequate privacy during their treatment at public hospital.

Table No.1: Frequencies of different variables in government and private hospitals.

Government hospital (n=200)				Private hospital (n=200)	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Doctors treat in hurry	Always	126	63	19	9.5
	Sometimes	39	19.5	70	35
	Never	35	17.5	111	55.5
Medical terminologies used by doctors	Always	45	22.5	13	6.5
	Sometimes	70	35.5	96	48
	Never	85	42	91	45.5
Have to wait too long after calling the staff	Always	105	52.5	26	13
	Sometimes	45	22.5	69	34.5
	Never	50	25	105	52.5
Patients' involvement in decision making	Always	49	24.5	147	73.5
	Sometimes	34	17	42	21
	Never	117	58.5	11	5.5
Explanation of adverse effects of medicines	Always	55	27.5	95	47.5
	Sometimes	71	35.5	78	39
	Never	74	37	27	13.5
Privacy given by doctors	Always	15	7.5	167	83.5
	Sometimes	34	17	24	12
	Never	151	75.5	9	4.5

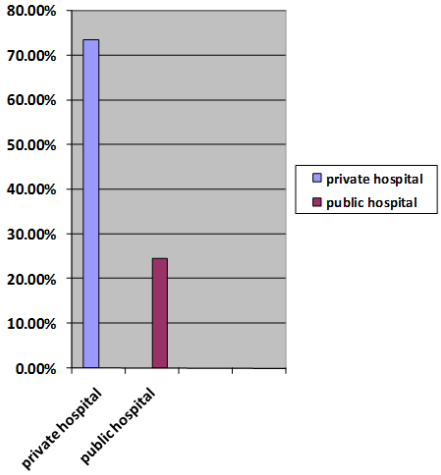

Figure No.1: Involvement of patients in decision making at private and public hospitals

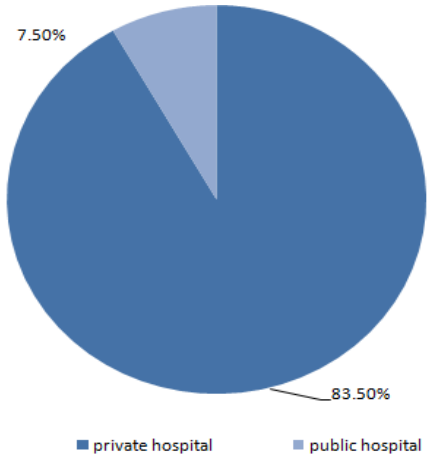

Figure No..2: Provision of privacy to patients by the staff at private and public hospitals

To compare the levels of patient satisfaction between government and private sector hospitals, Chi square test was applied on different variables. Significant differences were found between quality of health care services in both type of health care systems with regards to hygiene, explanation of adverse effects of medicines by hospital staff, efficiency of nurses and

involvement of patients in decision making process about their treatment, with private hospitals performing better where difference exists. However, majority of the respondents availing health care services at the public sector hospital were satisfied with the competence and capabilities of doctors serving at these hospitals. Moreover, private hospitals showed an overall better level of patient satisfaction in most of the domains of health care.

DISCUSSION

The idea of quality means higher performance and excellence[17.] Delivering quality services has a directly proportional relationship with customer satisfaction, gaining their confidence and their loyalty [18, 19]. In this rapidly expanding globe, where knowledge is only a click away, patients are now more aware of their own health conditions, prognosis of their diseases, the reasoning and justifications behind medical decisions taken by their physicians and the level of health outcomes to be expected of various treatment modalities[20]. Patient satisfaction is regarded as an important indicator for assessment of the quality of the health care[21]. Quality of the health services has been based on professional practice standard, however, over the last decade, patients' perception about health care services has been accepted as an indicator to measure quality of health care [22].

This study was conducted with the purpose to ascertain patients' level of satisfaction between public and private hospitals in Karachi, so that the gaps, if any, may be identified and which may be addressed in future health care programs and policies.

Findings of the study show that there exists significant difference between public and private hospitals, with regards to overall hygiene and cleanliness, as well as the availability of modern equipments and physical facilities, private hospitals being more cleaner and well equipped than the government hospitals. Our results are similar to the study which was conducted in Turkey [23]. Similarly, the waiting time to see a health care provider was found to be shorter at the private hospitals as compared to public sector hospital.

With regards to the financial expenditures on health care facilities, patients attending private hospitals had to pay bills which were beyond their affordability. This may be mainly because private hospitals are dependent on the profits that they generate and this profit is in turn used to upgrade the facilities at the private health care facilities, leading to greater patient satisfaction. Whereas public hospitals are totally dependent on government support and funds, and this fact reflects on the overall poorly managed facilities supplied at these hospitals.

Similar studies were found in the literature [6,16.23,24], which revealed that private hospitals perform better in most of the aspects of health care services delivery. However, one study conducted in Islamabad[25] revealed that public hospitals in Islamabad are providing better services than private hospitals, which is in contrast to the results of our study.

CONCLUSION

It is evident from the above discussion that_private hospitals are mobilizing their resources in order to provide better health care services to their patients, resulting in better patient satisfaction level among these patients, whereas public hospitals are not making any serious efforts to improve the quality of their services, nor they are satisfactorily meeting up with the health care demands of the public.

Conflict of Interest: The study has no conflict of interest to declare by any author.

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