
ANALYSIS OF THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE PATIENT SATISFACTION IN HEALTHCARE

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Please cite this paper as:

Mehedințu, M., Voicu, R., Stoica, M. and Filip, A., 2020. Analysis of the Factors That Influence Patient Satisfaction in Healthcare. In: R. Pamfilie, V. Dinu, L. Tăchiciu, D. Pleșea, C. Vasiliu eds. *6th BASIQ International Conference on New Trends in Sustainable Business and Consumption*. Messina, Italy, 4-6 June 2020. Bucharest: ASE, pp. 168-174

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to find out to what degree the hospitalized patients are satisfied with the physician-patient relationship and also with the quality of medical services offered by the medical unit. Also, another goal of the study is to increase awareness of the importance of satisfying patients' needs and expectations in the healthcare field. The perception of patient satisfaction was measured using the internal patient satisfaction questionnaires within the National Institute for Infectious Diseases "Prof. Dr. Matei Balș", from Bucharest, Romania. Analyzing patient experience with both the medical unit and the physician is a powerful tool that helps practitioners to properly incorporate patient perspectives in service delivery and also improve patient satisfaction. Findings indicate that if the patients are satisfied with the services offered by the medical unit, they will definitely recommend the hospital to their friends in case of medical needs. Moreover, when patients have a good perception of the quality of medical services provided by both the physician and the medical unit, this has a positive impact on their satisfaction and their trust. High patient satisfaction and positive feedback from the patients are very powerful indicators that show the involvement of doctors and the efforts of the medical unit in treating patients and the importance of keeping them satisfied.

Keywords

Patient satisfaction, quality in health care, health services, relationship marketing.

JEL Classification

I10, M10, M12.

Introduction

Increasing globalization, maturing markets, intensifying competition and changes in the consumer behavior are just a few factors that contributed to the significant development of the field of marketing in the recent decades. In the context where relationship marketing was

later defined as a key component of the holistic marketing, also known as modern marketing (Kotler, 2012), relationship marketing emphasizes the need to individualize the offer according to the specific needs of each client, through a continuous dialogue and different personalized forms of communication (Grönroos, 2004). Customer relationship marketing refers to attracting, maintaining and developing relationships with customers (Berry *et al.*, 1983). Good customer relationships can only be maintained if the customers are satisfied with the products or services received, customer satisfaction being vital for the success of a business. “Satisfaction is fundamental to the well being of individual consumers, to the profits of firms supported through purchasing and patronization, and to the stability of economic and political structures” (Oliver, 2015).

Patient satisfaction in healthcare

Like marketing, health services have undergone major changes in the last few decades. Nowadays, the patient is considered to be at the center of healthcare, but to put the patient in the first place requires a lot of discipline both from the doctors, assistants, and carers as well as from the institutions point of view. Healthcare is an increasingly competitive field, and studying patient experience with both the medical unit and the practitioner is a rather powerful tool that encourages physicians to better incorporate patient perspectives in service delivery and also improve patient satisfaction. Likewise, currently a much greater emphasis is placed on the quality of the medical services offered by the medical unit, as well as on the whole patient's experience, both in the relationship with the doctor and in the relationship with the medical unit. Patient satisfaction is "a health care recipient's reaction to salient aspects of the context, process, and result of their service experience" (Pascoe, 1983). It follows that determining the level of patient satisfaction is an important KPI that healthcare providers must take into account in order to obtain the patients' opinion on how they have been treated in the respective medical unit. “The key to patient satisfaction lies in: understanding the patient, understanding yourself and your hospital’s culture, and effectively utilizing your survey data” (Press, 1999). Also, the “overall cleanliness of the facilities, the availability of modern equipment, and a general feeling that the facilities are in good repair can enhance patient satisfaction” (Andaleeb, 1988), and these aspects also contribute significantly to patient retention and loyalty. In this context, quantitative research, using the questionnaire as a tool, is one of the most widely used and handy methods of researching patient satisfaction.

Also, in many hospitals, especially in the state field, collecting patient satisfaction data is mandatory, as it is part of the strategy for monitoring activities and improving services. Assessing the satisfaction of a service is harder than assessing the satisfaction of a product. Keeping patients satisfied is an important issue, as it contributes decisively to patient retention. In healthcare, “the patient defines the only criteria that count in evaluating service quality. Only patients can judge service quality; all other judgements are irrelevant” (Shelton, 2000). Keeping this in consideration, evaluating patient satisfaction is a strong outcome indicator of the quality of medical services provided by a healthcare unit. It has been found that the patient is more satisfied when the healthcare provider, meaning the healthcare unit or the physician, is willing to provide more information and to consider the participation of patients in making decisions concerning their treatment options (Joosten *et al.*, 2008).

Various methods have been addressed to study patient satisfaction concerning the quality of medical services, but satisfaction questionnaires have “undoubtedly the most commonly used method and must fulfill certain psychometric properties, especially if the aim is to generalize the information to the target population” (Gonzales *et al.*, 2005).

Research methodology

A quantitative research was performed using the survey method, using the questionnaire as a tool. The internal patient satisfaction questionnaires within the National Institute for

Infectious Diseases “Prof. Dr. Matei Balș”, from Bucharest, Romania, were analyzed in order to obtain data on patient satisfaction. The survey was conducted by the nurses, who administered the questionnaires in a face-to-face manner.

For this study, we selected the patient satisfaction questionnaires collected between January the 1st and December 31st, 2019. The study was conducted among hospitalized patients, both with acute and chronic diseases, and legal representatives of the patients. Data from a total number of 2348 questionnaires administered to patients and legal representatives of the patients, representing 49.37% of all hospitalizations in the analyzed month, was obtained by answering a total of 12 main subjects, containing 31 questions, to which are added the socio-demographic elements. The survey includes 20 closed questions relying on 5-point Likert scales to assess the main determinants of patients' satisfaction. The rest of the questions are divided as follows: eight dichotomous questions (that have only two possible answers), one question with multiple choices with 3 variants, and a single open question.

Socio-demographic data of the respondents

A total of 70% of the survey respondents are legal representatives of the patients, and the remaining 30% are patients who were hospitalized throughout the entire year of 2019. The survey respondents are divided into age groups as follows: 49% between 30-39 Y/O, 16% between 20-29 Y/O, 13% between 40-49 Y/O, 6% between 60-69 Y/O, 4% over 70 Y/O and 3% under 20 Y/O.

Regarding the gender of the respondents, 80% are women and 20% are men, while 75% of the respondents come from urban areas and 25% from rural areas. Regarding the level of education, 57.5% of the respondents graduated from high school, and 32% graduated from college, while 10.5% only graduated from primary or secondary school. Regarding the marital status, 80% of the respondents were married, 12% unmarried, 4% widowed, 3% divorced and 1% answered "other".

Analysis

The data was collected from the patient satisfaction questionnaires and compiled into a spreadsheet, then the data was compiled into raw totals and percentages, and then exported into graphics.

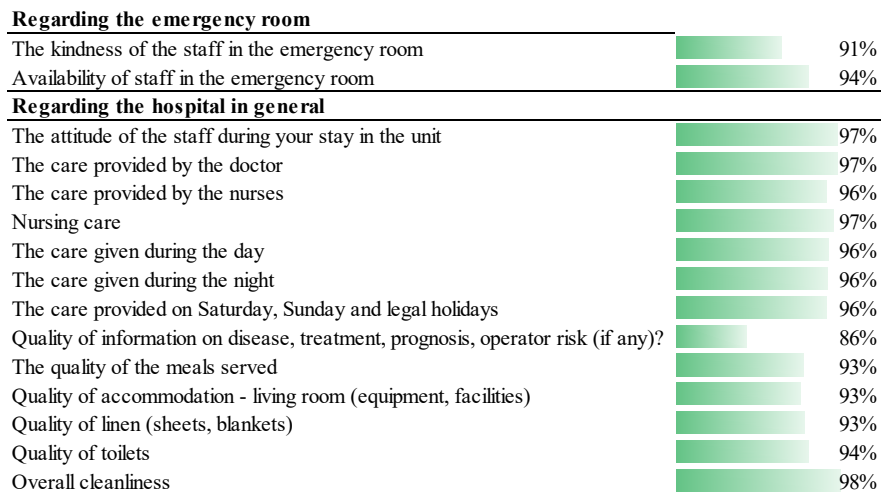


Fig. no. 1 How do you appreciate the quality of the services received by you, both at the emergency room, and in the hospital in general?

Source: authors, using raw data obtained with the approval of the National Institute for Infectious Diseases “Prof. Dr. Matei Balș”, Bucharest, Romania

Information analysis

The respondents' answers were scored according to the Likert scale, from 1 to 5, and then the results were analyzed by summing the total amount obtained and divided by the number of respondents.

Regarding how patients appreciate the quality of services received both at the emergency room, and in the hospital in general, an overwhelming majority had a very good or good experience, the only percentage lower, respectively 86%, being obtained by looking at the quality of meals served in the hospital. But the quality of the meals served does not depend entirely on the hospital's desire but also on the allocated budget, which is often not comprehensive.

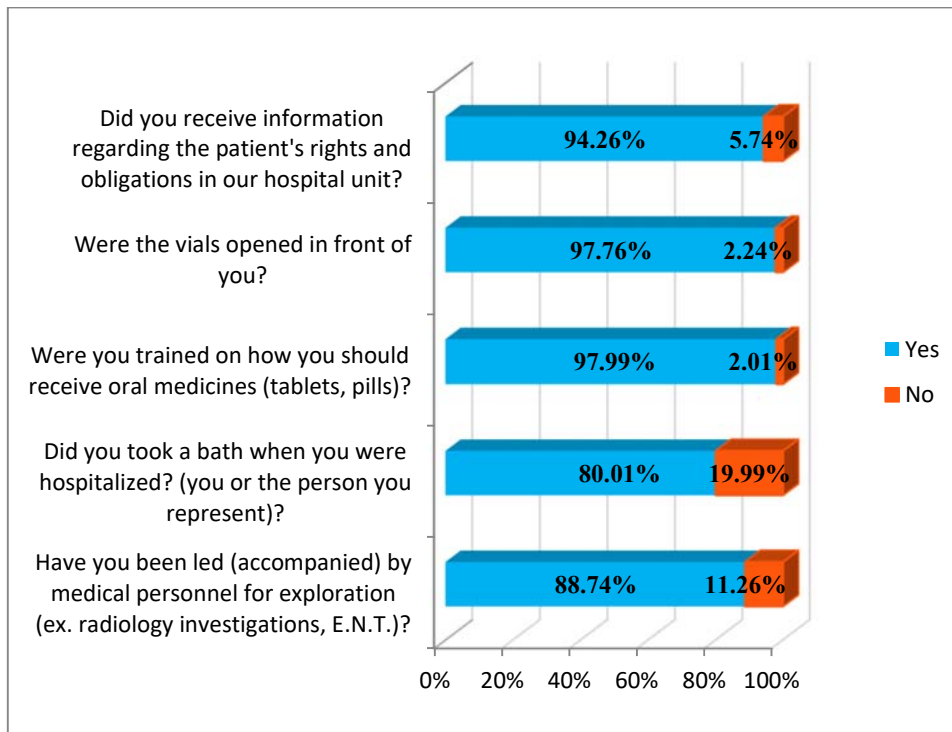


Fig. no. 2 In this hospital, you can say that:

Source: authors, using raw data obtained with the approval of the National Institute for Infectious Diseases "Prof. Dr. Matei Balș", Bucharest, Romania.

Information analysis

These percentages show the high level of the patients' or their legal representatives' satisfaction regarding the medical unit as a whole. A rather lower percentage, but still high, of 80.01% was obtained at the question related to the bath that the patients took when they were hospitalized. Taking a bath is part of the hospitalization procedure, but in case of emergencies or serious health issues, sometimes this step is skipped. Also, a lower percentage, compared to the other ones obtained in this survey, of 88.74% was obtained when asked if the patients or their legal representatives were accompanied by medical personnel for exploration or other medical investigations. Usually, this happens due to the fluctuations of personnel in the hospitals all over Romania, and if not treated properly, in the near future can become a serious factor affecting the quality of medical services and patients' satisfaction.

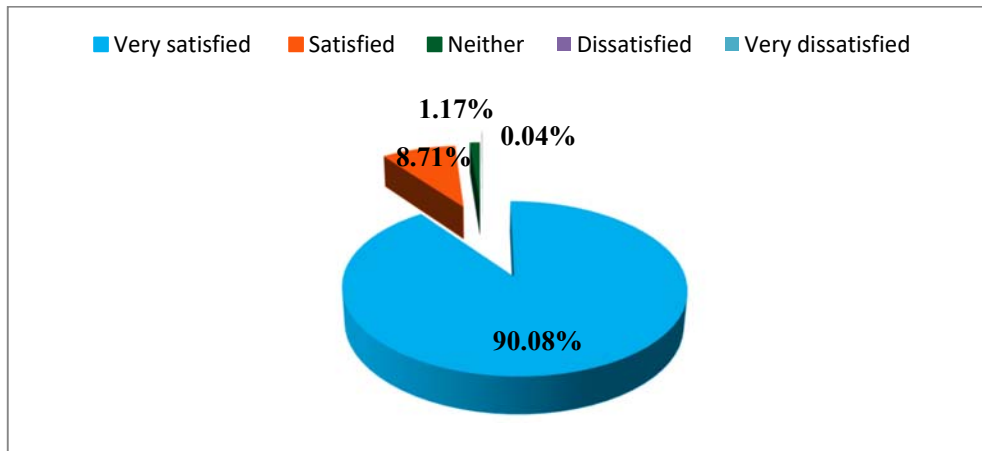


Fig. no. 3 How satisfied were you with the services offered by the hospital?

Source: authors, using raw data obtained with the approval of the National Institute for Infectious Diseases “Prof. Dr. Matei Balș”, Bucharest, Romania.

Information analysis

According to this graphic, over 98% of the total respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with the general services offered by the hospital. A small part of 1.17% of the respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, only 0.4% were dissatisfied and 0% were very dissatisfied.

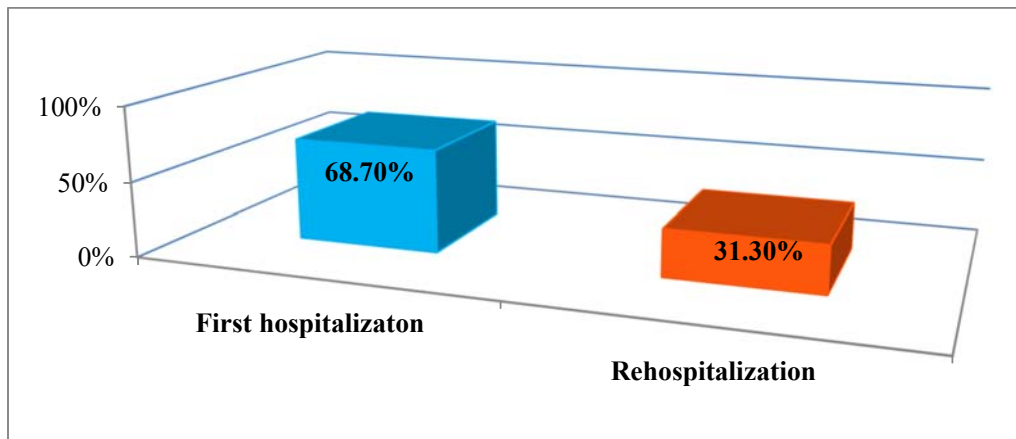


Fig. no. 4 If a close friend or someone you know is in need of a medical service that is available here, would you recommend this hospital?

Source: authors, using raw data obtained with the approval of the National Institute for Infectious Diseases “Prof. Dr. Matei Balș”, Bucharest, Romania.

Information analysis

Being a tertiary care public hospital and offering a 24-hour open emergency room, it is normal for the majority of patients who are hospitalized at the National Institute for Infectious Diseases “Prof. Dr. Matei Balș” to be at their first hospitalization, but the percentage of persons which are rehospitalized is very high. This indicates that patients are satisfied with the medical services received from the physicians and the medical unit as a whole, and also shows the

high level of involvement provided by the medical unit and the efforts to keep patients satisfied.

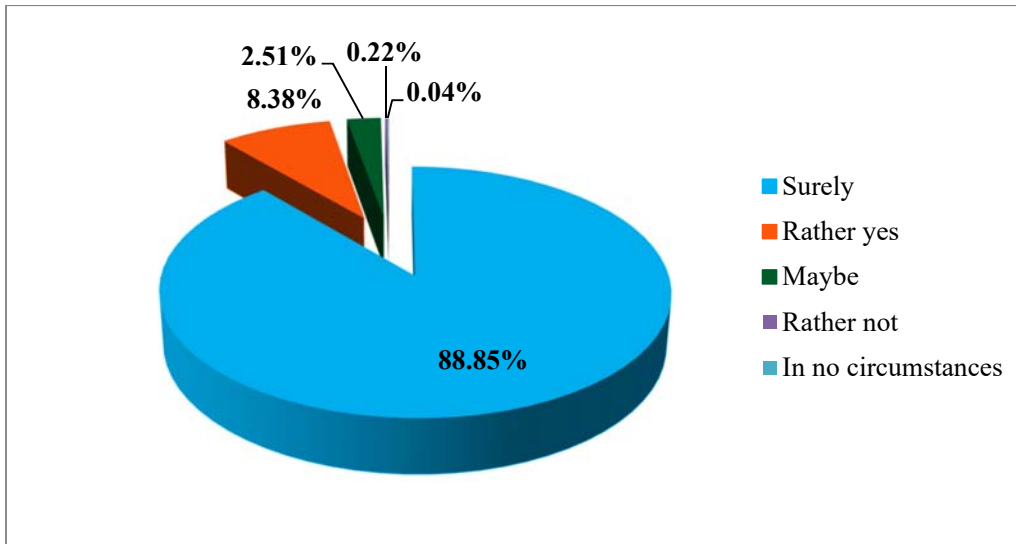


Fig. no. 5 If a close friend or someone you know is in need of a medical service that is available here, would you recommend this hospital?

Source: authors, using raw data obtained with the approval of the National Institute for Infectious Diseases "Prof. Dr. Matei Balș", Bucharest, Romania.

Information analysis

This chart shows that over 88% of the respondents would recommend this hospital to a close friend or someone they know. 8.38% may recommend the hospital, 2.51% may recommend it and only 0.26% will not recommend this hospital. Such a favorable percentage shows that patients and their legal representatives who completed the survey appreciate the quality of medical services provided by the doctors in this hospital, but also they are satisfied with the hospital in general.

Managerial implications

This study proved that conducting surveys using the questionnaire as a tool is an important asset that helps hospitals to identify the characteristics of the medical services that have the most impact on patient satisfaction. In this way, hospitals can improve and monitor over time the activities that have the most influence on improving patients' satisfaction and their perceptions over the medical services. In order to obtain higher scores and to improve the quality of medical services, it is necessary for the hospitals to be in a continuous activity of improving the patients' journey during the hospitalization and to keep the patients satisfied. The greater the emphasis on patient satisfaction, the more the hospital management proves to be more involved in the process of maintaining the patients' satisfaction at a high level. Activities such as the accommodation conditions, overall cleanliness, the quality of linen (sheets and blankets) and the friendliness of the staff have a great contribution to keeping the patients satisfied.

Acknowledgement: This paper was co-financed by The Bucharest University of Economic Studies during the PhD program.

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