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STUDY OF PATIENT'S OPINIONS IN A DIAGNOSTIC CENTRE TO MEASURE PATIENT SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Patient satisfaction surveys guide for betterment of service as per people's needs and this study aims to understand the process involved.

Method: Quantitative study done in a diagnostic centre with structured questionnaire from January to March, 2011. 66 home visit, 84 collection centre and 14 lab to lab feedback forms were filled. Statistical analysis was done with SPSS 15.

Results: At collection centers, 100% customers got immediate attention from reception. 95.24% patients had smiling interaction from lab staff. Only 50% patients were given probable estimate of bill. 7.14% patients were not informed about probable report collection time. None of the 84 patients had to wait for report collection. In home visit 6.06% patients reported delayed service. In lab to lab feedback 42.86% felt report turn around time was average.

Conclusion: Efforts should be made to improve the lacunas, so that customer retention and repeat customer proportion increases.

Keywords: Satisfaction, patient, diagnostic center, perception

INTRODUCTION

Healthcare in India is under a transformative phase.[1] From purely clinical judgement, physician's now are riling more & more on "Diagnostic centres", which are offering advanced, high tech test, with high sensitivity and specificity, giving accurate results. Diagnostics' is a monetary, manpower and technology intensive industry. Technological advances in the diagnostic care are the order of the day. The challenge for such Diagnostic setups is to balance satisfaction of patients and clinicians, which is the primary reason for its existence with profit generation for maintaining expensive set-up. In today's world, healthcare market is growing very fast and there is intense competition to grab a lion's share.[1] Moreover, Consumer of today's health care sector is very

alert and aware about his rights and the standards of services he is going to pay for.[2] Thus, with time, health care market is becoming more & more buyer's market rather than seller's market.[3] It is this redefining of patients as Consumers that is increasing the importance of patient satisfaction and related surveys.[3] "Satisfaction" is multi-dimensional with following parameters influencing it: Past experiences on health services, Lifestyle\Lack of knowledge of alternatives, Level of expectation, Socio-demographic variables, Quality of questionnaire and way of administering it, outcome of treatment, safety and access to physician etc.[1] Customer satisfaction is important to estimate and improve present level of the quality of services.[2] It is also important to marketer because it is a significant determinant of repeat sales, positive word-of-mouth, and consumer loyalty.[3] A Delighted patient will become a loyal 'apostle', telling others about his / her great experience, while Outraged one will certainly not return and propagate negative aspects of the healthcare provider in an emotional way.[4] Since in healthcare, word-of-mouth advertising is the most effective way of communication, both will have a very high positive / negative impact on the healthcare provider's business.[4] Every 1% increase in customer satisfaction can lead to 3% increase in market capitalization and it costs three to four times money to acquire new customer than to make repeat sales to an existing one.

The current study has been undertaken specifically for understanding the process involved. An effort was made to determine the satisfaction level amongst patients of a leading NABL accredited, private diagnostic centre located in Surat to get feedback from patients regarding services provided, analysis of which can guide for necessary actions for betterment of the service as per the people's needs.

METHODS

It is a Quantitative study design, taken place over a three month period in a single diagnostic centre from January to March, 2011. Depending on research objective and literature review structured questionnaire in English/Gujarati was prepared. The questionnaires were of three kinds. One was for collection center patients, to assess their satisfaction with collection centre, second for patients for whom facility of home visit for sample collection is provided and third

to collect lab to lab feedback in case of referral of specimen for review from another laboratory. Prior Permission from lab management was taken to carry out the study. Questionnaire forms were given to customers at the time of report collection to give their feedback. In case of home health service, forms were given at the time of report delivery at home. The nature of the research was explained to the patients and assurance about the secrecy of the feedbacks was given. Lab to lab feedback forms were filled on telephone. Total 33 home visit patient forms and 42 collection centre patient forms were filled. Seven lab to lab feedback forms were also filled. Though there was no problem in individual patient form filling, due to resistance and non-availability only seven lab to lab feedback forms were filled from seven different labs.

Statistics: The data thus collected was then entered in Excel sheet, and after proper data cleaning, Statistical analysis was done with help of Microsoft Office Excel 2007 and SPSS 15.

RESULTS

At collection centres, from all 42 patients, 25(59.52%) were found regular/repeat customer of lab, while 17(40.48%) were first time visitors. All 42(100%) customers got immediate attention from reception on visiting the lab. While 2(4.76%) of patients reported no interaction with lab staff, 40(95.24%) patients had a smiling interaction and none had an irritable response.

Table 1: Very much satisfaction rate of collection centres patients (N=42)

Parameter	Frequency(%)
Regular /repeat customers	25 (59.52)
Prompt response from reception staff	42 (100)
Smiling interaction from lab staff	40 (95.24)
Given idea of probable bill amount	21 (50)
Blood collection experience	7 (16.67)
Informed for probable report collection time	39 (92.86)
No waiting for report collection	42 (100)

Only 21(50%) patients were given probable estimate of bill for the tests opted, rest 21(50%) patients didn't have any idea of their bill amount until the time of bill payment. 7(16.67%)

out of 42 patients were very satisfied and 35(83.33%) were averagely satisfied with blood collection procedure. Three (7.14%) out of 42 patients were not informed about probable report collection time by reception staff while rest 39(92.86%) were informed by the reception for probable time of report collection depending on test opted. None of the 42 patient/relative had to wait for report collection on arriving for report collection at a given time (table 1).

On Analysis of home visit's patient satisfaction questionnaire, out of total 33 home visit patients in study, excluding the non respondents, 5.88% were first timers and 94.12% repeaters/regular customers. All 33(100%) were satisfied with reception's response on calling for request of home health service. Thirty-one (93.94%) of patients felt the service was delivered on time, while 2(6.06%) out of 33 reported delayed service delivery, that is the sample collection boy/service boy did not come on time for sample collection. One (3.03%) felt the experience of blood collection and comfort was excellent and 32(96.97%) reported it as average. (table 2)

Table 2: Excellent experience rate of home visit patients (N=33)

Parameter	Frequency(%)
Regular /repeat customer proportions	16 (48.48)
Response from reception on collection request	0 (0)
Punctuality of sample collection boy	31 (93.94)
Customer service centre experience	1 (3.03)
Blood collection experience	1 (3.03)
Overall experience	2 (6.06)

In lab to lab feedback assessment, for experience of other labs with the study lab in case of sending specimens for review, only seven labs could be assessed. Out of which 5(71.43%) were very satisfied and 2(28.57%) were averagely satisfied with the accuracy of test results. While three labs were very satisfied about their satisfaction of doubts and queries by lab pathologist and team, other 4(57.14%) were only averagely satisfied. The satisfaction with abnormal test result notification to requesting lab on phone was excellent with 5(71.43%) labs. Four (57.14%) of the labs were very satisfied with the report turnaround time, and 3(42.86%)

averagely satisfied. Courier boy's attitude while service for sample collection was also very satisfactory as reported by 6(85.71%) labs. All 7 (100%) labs were very satisfied overall in dealing with lab (table 3).

Table 3: Very much satisfaction rate in Lab to lab feedback (N=7)

Parameter	Frequency(%)
Accuracy of test results	5 (71.43)
Satisfaction of doubts/queries/questions	3 (42.86)
Abnormal result notification	5 (71.43)
Test report turnaround time	4 (57.14)
Answer to telephone queries	1 (14.29)
Lab management responsiveness	4 (57.14)
Telephone courtesy	6 (85.7)
Courier boy's attitude on pick-up of samples	7 (100)
Courier boy's response to service request	6 (85.7)
Overall experience with lab	7 (100)

DISCUSSION

Patient's or his relative's satisfaction is a good indicator to measure the performance of the healthcare set-up. As it is a well known fact that it takes more efforts to gain a new customer than to retain the old one, efforts should be made to retain the customer and increase repeat customer proportion by the lab management, which is only 60% in present study. Reasons for Higher satisfaction with reception's response can be immediate positive courteous behaviour due to repeated training of front desk and call centre staff on customer relation, decent dressing, polite tone and smiling interaction, telephone manners and continuous supervision by higher management. Higher satisfaction with staff interaction is also due to above reasons only, with repeated emphasis by higher management to staff on keeping smiling, polite, sympathetic, helpful, customer is king attitude. It was interesting to note that giving financial estimate to patient for tests they are opting is an important determinant in patient's overall satisfaction with the setup. In this survey only 50% were given their approx. bill estimate, which should be ideally 100%. Healthcare in today's world is very expensive. Secondly, it's a sudden, unexpected burden on family's financial budget in country like India where majority of population is uninsured. So, it will

be very helpful for patient to know their approx. bill amount in advance for arranging money. Very much satisfaction amongst patients with blood collection procedure in present study can be due to comfortable blood collection chair, highly trained paramedical staff for blood collection, proper antiseptic precautions, private collection room, less waiting etc. In today's fast world for everyone time is money. Additionally, in patient's management also delayed report can be an obstacle. So lab's commitment to deliver report on time without fails at given time is highly appreciated among patient/relatives and referring labs. Similarly, during home visit also on time reaching for sample collection is very much rated among patient community. All referring labs were also satisfied overall, though sample size for assessing referring lab satisfaction was not enough. Reasons found for such higher satisfaction were accurate test results with consistent quality checks, and positive and negative sample runs at frequent intervals, barcode system for samples to minimize human errors in entering reports etc., adopting latest technology and presence of most experienced histopathologist, Short Turn Around Time(TAT) of test results, and strict adherence to TAT fixed for the particular test report, Prompt Notification of abnormal test results, to the referring doctors so that appropriate timely decision in patient management can be taken by treating physician without wasting critical time, Appropriate telephone courtesy by pathologists as well as other staffs with answering physician's questions/queries and doubts related to patient's reports, Positive courier boy's attitude on service request for collection of specimen and timely delivery of service on his part due to strict observation from higher management.

CONCLUSION

The current survey cannot be classified as an exhaustive survey encompassing all parameters that need assessment. However the survey has been able to highlight certain main parameters that need attention. With high percentage of overall satisfaction found in present survey, important point to remember is patients are not just satisfied with modern sophisticated equipment, top class furniture or skilled diagnose alone, but what they need is human touch from the healthcare setup and staff in time when they are already in pain.

Acknowledgements

RECOMMENDATION:

Efforts needed to retain customer and increase repeat customer proportion. All patients should be told their probable bill amount in advance. Comfortable blood collection procedure and satisfaction of patient's/referral doctor's doubts are areas that need to be worked on. Areas having 70-90% satisfaction should be aimed not less than 100%.

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