Improving Patient Satisfaction in Health Services: An Application At Dumlupinar University Kutahya Evliya Celebi Education & Research Hospital

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to reveal the factors in improving patient satisfaction at health institutions. In line with this aim, the effect of service quality perceptions and corporate image on patient satisfaction was analysed through the data acquired from 307 patients at Dumlupinar University Kutahya Evliya Celebi Education & Research Hospital using multiple regression model. Moreover, the patients' perceptions about service quality dimensions were also evaluated through the same data. As a result of the analyses, it was determined that the highest perceptions of the patients about service quality dimensions turned out to be in tangibles and reliability dimensions. On the other hand, it was also determined that perceived service quality and corporate image are effective on patient satisfaction. The results of this study are a guide for public hospitals to increase their service presentation quality and to develop their corporate image. These improvements will increase customer satisfaction and thus enable public hospitals to be preferred more.

Key Words: Perceived service quality, corporate image, patient satisfaction, regression analysis

1.Introduction

Quality of health services, adequacy of physical facilities and their layout, attitudes and behaviours of hospital employees and the image of the hospital play an important role in customers' decisions upon which hospital to choose (Tengilimoğlu 2001; Berkawitz and Flexner 1981). Service quality is the difference between customer expectations and perceptions after presentation (Zeithaml et al. 1990) and service quality in health sector is an important element in achieving customer satisfaction (İzci and Saydan 2013). Corporate image is the impressions of customers about the institution (Barich & Kotler 1991). Corporate image is explained by the following criteria: good management of the institution, its financial power, innovative capabilities, employing qualified staff and being conscious of social responsibilities (İzci and Saydan 2013). In this sense, impressions of patients about a hospital determine that hospital's image. Corporate image has a positive correlation with customer satisfaction and customer preferences (Heung et al. 1996; Mazanec 1995).

The aim of this study is to determine the effect of patients' perceived service quality and corporate image of Dumlupinar University Kutahya Evliya Celebi Education & Research Hospital on patients' satisfaction. This hospital started service in Kutahya in 1968 as Kutahya SSI (Social Insurance Institution) Hospital and, in order to provide a more efficient service, was turned into Dumlupinar University Kutahya Evliya Celebi Education & Research Hospital in 2011. The study is comprised of five parts. In the first part, the problem about the factors effective on achieving patient satisfaction is explained. In the second part, perceived service quality, corporate image and patient satisfaction are explained. The third part presents the research methodology. In the fourth part, the analysis applications and findings for the effect of perceived service quality and corporate image on patient satisfaction are presented. The fifth part involves the research conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Perceived Service Quality

Previously, quality used to be evaluated by technical assessment of a business and interpreted according to manufacturing and technical standards. In this process, customer thoughts and expectations weren't involved. However, today, rather than meeting the needs of the business or customers, quality puts the responsibility of understanding customer thoughts and expectations on the executives. Executives who do not base service quality on customers exploit the business resources only to achieve profit, sales and market share and therefore cannot grasp the correlation between service quality and better business performance. Depending on customer

expectations, employees' evaluations and executives' vision, the dimensions of service quality are listed as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Zeithaml et al. 1990). Tangibles are regarded as physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel; reliability is considered as the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately; responsiveness denotes willingness to help customers and provide prompt service; assurance is thought as knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence; empathy is thought to include access, communication and understanding the customer and is considered as caring and individualized attention of the employees to customers (Rahaman et al. 2011; Iwaarden 2003).

When it comes to public corporations and service conditions in these institutions, customer needs and expectations vary. Enhancement applications for service quality in public corporations are slow, which is due to public restrictions, lack of free action in activities and need for deciding upon laws and regulations (Ramseook et al. 2010; Teicher 2002). In a study in Malaysia to reveal the service quality levels in public corporations and the most important dimension of service quality, it is understood that depending on external customer expectations and perceptions, the most important dimension of quality is tangibles (Ilhaamie 2010). In public sector, customer oriented service development system should be used for efficiency in designing and managing service quality. In this process, satisfaction is guaranteed by determining the customer demands accurately through interaction with customers. Moreover, public corporations should also adopt successful applications of private sector. Public corporations should get rid of their traditional hierarchic structure, focus on customers and activate customer oriented developments in accordance with the competitive environment (Hsiao & Lin 2008). Therefore, enhancement of service quality in public hospitals is necessary and crucial.

Quality in health services is defined as determining and satisfying patients' expectations and achieving long-term satisfaction in patients with service presentation. Accurate diagnosis and treatment, presenting prompt and genial service, a sanitary hospital and affordable prices are the determiners of quality in health services (Taşlıyan & Akyüz 2010; Asunokutlu 2004).

Wu emphasizes that quality of health services is a very efficient tool in developing patient satisfaction and adds that patient loyalty can be assured in this way. In this process, it is stated that hospital administrators should develop customer-based service processes and the presented health service quality should be enhanced upon the service elements of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Hospital staff should possess professionalism and technical expertise as well as forming empathy with such sensitive behaviours as being kind to patients, understanding their needs and showing interest to them in order to earn their trust. Furthermore, the employees should also satisfy the information needs of the patients about the health service presentation process and make accurate, sincere and reliable effort during service presentation process. On the other hand, environmental hygiene, hospital layout order, room comfort and staff appearance should be paid attention to (Wu 2011).

2.2. Corporate Image

Due to the difficulties in perceptibility of service quality and concurrency of production and consumption, especially hospitals and similar service corporations should focus on enhancing corporate image to facilitate their perceptibility (Derin & Demirel 2010). For hospitals, having a good and strong image is one of the most important factors in being preferable. While assessing hospital image, institutional communication, service quality, staff appearance, attitudes, behaviours and opinions, physical competence and professional attributes are crucial (Özata & Sevinç 2006; Ayhan & Canöz 2006). In Aksoy and Bayramoğlu's study to determine the elements of corporate image in health institutions (2008), it is revealed that those who make use of health services consider the following five elements important in forming corporate image: employees' clothes, institutional communication, employees' behaviours and consistency, reducing the perceived cost, service versatility and convenience in shifting service.

Also, Karbalaei advocates that brand value has a significantly positive effect on hospital image and therefore hospital administrators should meticulously focus on brand value management to achieve a positive image (Karbalaei 2013). Wu emphasizes that hospital administrators should pay attention to achieving a positive image for their hospitals to secure patient loyalty. On the other hand, hospital administrators can also improve hospital's brand image and patient loyalty by increasing perceived service quality and patient satisfaction. Also, by using such marketing activities as advertisement, public relations, efficient interaction with patients, service training for employees and internet marketing efficiently, positive brand image formation efforts should be reinforced and sustained. Positive brand image of a hospital provides it with competitive advantages (Wu 2011).

Corporate image safeguards sensitivity of the institution to its long-term targets, clarifies the paths to be followed to achieve these targets, provides it with competitive advantage, boosts internal and external communication of the institution, has positive effects on customer satisfaction and preferences, increases customer loyalty and trust in the institution and provides coordination between institutional shareholders (Bolat 2006). Erdoğan et al. (2006); Andreassen & Lındestad (1998) advocated that corporate image is crucial in forming customer satisfaction and customers' perceived quality about the institution and its presentations. On the other hand, to achieve a powerful corporate image, institutional vision and mission are required to be formed and customer satisfaction and product quality should be enhanced. Besides, media relations should also be reinforced with advertisements, sponsorship and social responsibility activities (Bolat 2006).

2.3. Patient Satisfaction

For institutions, determination of the needs and demands of consumers, to what extent the products can meet these needs and demands and after-sales customer satisfaction are crucial in managing customer suggestions and complaints (Yükselen 2006). Customers assess products according to whether they meet their expectations. Therefore, institutions should orient customer expectations (Blattberg, et al. 2001). To achieve customer satisfaction, customer needs and demands and the institutional presentations to meet them should be coherent (Hunter & Michl 2000). Hence, institutional presentations should be in line with customer needs, the products should avail customers and customers' relations with the institution should be facilitated. This process, depending on the enhancement of service level, will increase customer satisfaction (Mclntyre and Peck 1998). If the institution can come up with and sustain compatible strategies to customer needs and expectations, it will achieve competitive advantage (Ravald & Grönross 1996).

Because satisfaction is the perception arising from customer experience about an institution's products, sales process and after-sales services (Homburg & Giering, 2001), customers' behaviours should be monitored (Mclntyre & Peck 1998). Since customers do evaluation of quality performance and satisfaction among alternatives (Olsen 2002), institutions should do remediation in their products and product presentations (Torlak et al. 2007). In particular, developing relations between employees and customers upon trust ensures customer satisfaction (Mercedes et al. 2004). Because customer satisfaction is effective on customers' purchasing behaviours (Bolton et al. 2004), customer prefers institutional presentations again (Chen & Quester, 2007). On the other hand, the level of customer satisfaction can also affect the attitudes of those who are not customers yet, which enables gaining new customers and thus boosting profit development (Yeung & Ennew 2000).

Besides being one of the most important aims sought by hospitals, patient satisfaction is also an effective marketing tool in accessing to new customers. Patient satisfaction is the contentment in patients depending on their expectations from the hospital and their perceptions after using the health service presentations of the hospital. If the hospital presents a performance below these expectations, this will cause patient dissatisfaction (Bhaskar 2012).

Patient satisfaction depends on the patient, the service providers and the characteristics of the institution (Özer & Çakıl 2007). Among the factors affecting patient satisfaction are the age, education level, gender and income of the patient, whether s/he is under the cover of social security, residence, diagnosis and treatment process, duration of hospital stay and her/his experiences in the hospital (Kavuncubaşı 2000). In a study of Kırılmaz to determine the effect of education level, income and age of patients on patient satisfaction at six hospitals of Ministry of Health (2013), it is determined that patient satisfaction level differentiates according to education level, income and age of patients. The results show that as education level and income increase, patient satisfaction decreases, while as the age of the patient increases, so does the satisfaction level of the patient. In Sarp and Tükel's study at İbn-i Sina Hospital (1999), the reason for the increase in dissatisfaction of the patients with the health services according to the patients' education level is attached to the increase in the level of expectation from these services and this shows that the patients expect more attention from the hospital staff. On the other hand, in a study of Kıdak and Aksaraylı (2008), in a study on patients belonging to SSI (Social Security Institution), to the other social security institution and those without any social security comparing their satisfaction levels, it is revealed that the patients belonging to the other social security institution have a higher satisfaction level than those belonging to SSI.

Characteristics, courtesy, attention, empathy capabilities, professionalism of those who provide health service and their ability to form a relation with their patients upon trust are all effective of the satisfaction of patients (Yılmaz 2001; Avis 1995). Şişe (2013) reveals that providing clear and adequate information to patients is crucial and that such training programs at hospitals that will facilitate providing clear and adequate information to patients are required.

In Turkey, while satisfaction with health services was 39,5% in 2003, it rose to 74,8% in 2012. During the same period, the rate of dissatisfaction of the patients with health service decreased; while the rate of dissatisfaction was 21,2% in 2003, this rate decreased to 12% in 2012 (DİE- State Statistics Institute, 2012). This can, in a general sense, be regarded as an increase in the quality of health services. In this context, institutional characteristics effective on formation of patient satisfaction are also important. In a study of Önsüz et al. (2008), to determine the satisfaction levels of the patients at a Medical Faculty Hospital in İstanbul, it is determined that physical conditions of the hospital are effective on the satisfaction of the patients. The scope of physical conditions of the hospital involves hygiene of the bedding and the rooms, ventilation of the rooms, silence level of the rooms, savour of the hospital food, hygiene of the food plates and food service. It is understood that enhancement of these conditions will increase patient satisfaction.

3. Research Methodology

Achieving satisfaction in customers using an institution's presentations is crucial in activating the customer as a shareholder of that institution and for development of that institution. The aim of this study is to determine the effect of patients' perceived service quality and corporate image of Dumlupinar University Kutahya Evliya Celebi Education & Research Hospital on patients' satisfaction and to put forth suggestions to raise patient satisfaction.

Raising service quality enables customers to assess an institution more positively and improving customer satisfaction (Bolton et al. 2004; Durvasula et al. 2004; Hess et al. 2003; Chiou et al. 2002). In a study of Kamdampully and Suhartanto (2000) to determine the effect of business image of service businesses on customer satisfaction and loyalty, it is found that corporate image has an important effect on customer satisfaction and loyalty. Upon this information, the research model is structured as in Fig. 1.
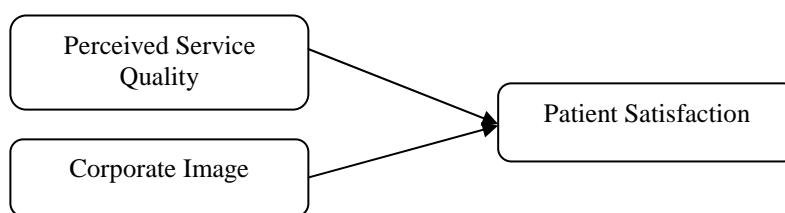

Fig. 1. Research Model

The hypotheses developed for this research model are as follows:

H_1: Service quality perceived for hospital is effective on patient satisfaction.

H_2: Corporate image for hospital is effective on patient satisfaction.

The main population of the study was comprised of 2.206 patients staying at Dumlupinar University Kutahya Evliya Celebi Education & Research Hospital at the city centre of Kutahya between 20th May and 20th June 2013. In terms of time and cost, random sampling was applied and simple random sampling method was used. Since the number of the patients making up the population was 2.206, taking p=0.5, q=0.5, d=0,10 and z=1,96, using equation (1), the sampling size was determined 92 patients (Işık 2006).

$$n = \frac{Nz^2 pq}{Nd^2 + z^2 pq}$$ ……………………………………………………………… (1)

Survey method was used for gathering the research data and the questionnaire was applied to the patients through face to face interview. After gathering total 307 questionnaire forms in a month, the sufficient sampling size was achieved. The questionnaire is comprised of four parts. In the first part, there are questions to determine the service quality provided by the hospital. The questions in this part are adapted from the expressions composing the SERVQUAL scale developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988). In the second part, there are questions about the image of the hospital in the patient. These questions are taken from the image scale of Rust et al. (2000) for brand value in an airline business. The third part consists of questions to measure patient satisfaction which are adapted from the original scale of Oliver (1980). In the last part of the questionnaire, there are questions to reveal the demographic characteristics of the patients. The questionnaire has a 5 Likert type scale with the following expressions: (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree (3) Undecided (4) Agree (5) Strongly

Agree. The replies of the patients were analysed using SPSS 15.0 for Windows package program. Firstly, the questionnaire was applied to a sampling of 30 units to reveal the reliability of the scale and Cronbach's Alpha was found 98.4%, which shows that the scale is highly reliable. As a result of reliability analysis applied to Customer Satisfaction Scale, Cronbach Alpha was found 97.3%, which also shows that the scale is highly reliable. The research findings first touch on descriptive statistics for the demographic characteristics of the participant patients. After evaluating the perceptions of the patients about service quality dimensions, the effect of perceived service quality and corporate image on patient satisfaction was analysed and interpreted by building a multiple regression model.

4. Research Findings

4.1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the participant patients. 49.2% of the participant patients are female while 50.8% are male. The age distribution of the participant patients is as follows: 28.3% are 25-34 years old; 25.7% are 35-44 years old; 20% are 18-24 years old; 14.3% are 45-54 years old; 10.7% are 55 and above.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	151	49.2
Male	156	50.8
Total	307	100.0
Age		
18-24	64	20.8
25-34	87	28.3
35-44	79	25.7
45-54	44	14.3
55 and above	33	10.7
Total	307	100.0
Education Level		
Primary School	75	24.4
Secondary School	48	15.6
High School	80	26.1
University	85	27.7
Master's Degree	19	6.2
Total	307	100.0
Marital Status		
Married	213	69.4
Single	94	30.6
Total	307	100.0
Occupation		
Public sector	46	15.0
Private sector	96	31.3
Retired	36	11.7
Housewife	86	28.0
Student	43	14.0
Total	307	100.0

In terms of the education level of the patients, it is seen that 27.7% are university graduates; 26.1% graduated from high school; 24.4% are primary school graduates; 15.6% graduated from secondary school; 6.2% have master's degree. On the other hand, 69.4% of the patients are married while 30.6% are single. Whereas 31.3% work in private sector and 28.0% are housewives, 15% are employed in public sector, 14% are students and 11.7% are retired.

4.2. Mean for Service Quality Dimensions

Table 2 shows the averages for service quality dimensions of Kutahya education and research hospital. According to the Table, although there aren't significant differences among the mean for service quality dimensions, it is determined that the highest perceptions for service quality of the hospital are in tangibles and reliability dimensions.

Table 2. Mean for Service Quality Dimensions

Service Quality Dimensions	Perception Mean
Tangibles	**3.51**
1 The hospital has modern equipment (medical tools).	3.47
2 The physical facilities of the hospital (exterior and interior appearance, design, places of use) are attractive.	3.41
3 The hospital staff are neat and clean dressed.	3.58
4 The hospital equipment (medical tools) are appropriate for its use.	3.60
Reliability	**3.51**
5 The hospital keeps its promises promptly.	3.31
6. When patients have problems, the hospital staff are sympathetic and helpful.	3.35
7. The operations for patients at the hospital are accurate at the first time.	3.70
8. Health services are provided within the specified time as promised (treatment process and duration).	3.54
9. Hospital records are kept accurately and meticulously.	3.67
Responsiveness	**3.36**
10. Patients are provided with complete information by the hospital about when a service will be provided (appointment system).	3.68
11. The hospital staff provide a quick service to patients.	3.28
12. The hospital staff are willing to help patients.	3.22
13. The hospital staff are prompt in meeting the needs and demands when requested by patients.	3.27
Assurance	**3,53**
14. The hospital staff are reliable.	3.59
15.I feel secure during service applications of the hospital staff.	3.62
16. The hospital staff are kind.	3.35
17. The hospital staff have adequate knowledge level in meeting the patients' expectations.	3.56
Empathy	**3,41**
18. The hospital staff show individual attention and interest to patients.	3.32
19. The hospital staff know the needs and demands of patients.	3.41
20. The hospital provides convenient working hours for all patients and visitors.	3.65
21. The hospital staff should value the interests of patients above.	3.16
22. The hospital does whatever it can for its patients.	3.08

4.3. Correlation Analysis

Table 3 shows the correlation analysis conducted to determine the relation between perceived service quality, corporate image and patient satisfaction.

Analysis of the relation between perceived service quality, corporate image and patient satisfaction in Table 3, it is seen that there is a positive significant relation between the variables "perceived service quality" and "patient satisfaction" at the highest level (r=0.878; p<0,01). A positive significant relation is also seen between "corporate image" and "patient satisfaction" (r=0.835; p<0,01) and between "perceived service quality" and "corporate image" (r=0.855; p<0,01) at a high level.

Table 3. Correlation Analysis for Patient Satisfaction

N=307	Perceived Service Quality	Corporate Image	Patient Satisfaction
Perceived Service Quality	1	855**	878**
Corporate Image		1	835**
Patient Satisfaction			1

** (p<0,01)

4.4. Regression Analysis

Table 4 shows the regression model constructed to explain the effect of perceived service quality and corporate image on patient satisfaction.

Table 4. Table of Regression Analysis of Patient Satisfaction

Model	**R**	**R^2**	**S.H.**	**F**	**P**
1	0.893	0.797	0.465	595.697	0,000
	B	**S.H.**	**Beta**	**t**	**P**
Constant	-0.445	0,119		-3.741	0,000
Perceived Service Quality	0,785	0,064	0,610	12.210	0,000
Corporate Image	0,354	0,056	0,314	6.281	0,000

Patient Satisfaction= -0.445 + 0,785X_1 (Perceived Service Quality) + 0,354X_2 (Corporate image)

According to Table 4, there is a statistically significant relation between patient satisfaction and perceived service quality and corporate image (p<0.05). There is a strong relation between the variables (R= 0.893). Coefficient of Determination is found R^2=0.797 and it is seen that 79.7% of the patient satisfaction depends on perceived service quality and corporate image.

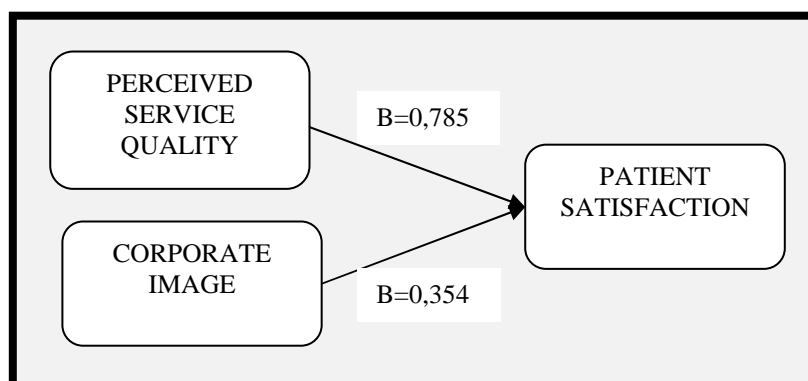The model developed upon this result is shown in Fig. 2.

Fig. 2. The Model Developed for Patient Satisfaction

In this regression analysis, the effect value of perceived service quality on patient satisfaction is 0.785; the effect value of corporate image is 0.354. Upon this result, hypotheses H_1 and H_2 are accepted.

5. Conclusion & Suggestions

In health sector, the effect of increasing the patient-oriented service presentations on developing patient satisfaction is getting more and more important. In this sense, increasing the service presentation quality at hospitals will enable improving patients' perceptions and thus raising patient satisfaction. On the other hand, corporate image is a very important factor for institutions to gain competitive advantage. A positive image in patients about a hospital will enable patient satisfaction and cause them to prefer that hospital again. In this study, it is determined that the perceived service quality and corporate image have a positive effect on patient satisfaction of the patients at the education and research hospital in Kutahya. These results are in line with the literature. In future studies, also considering the marketing communication elements that could be effective on patient satisfaction, a more extensive evaluation can be made. Also, the effect of perceived service quality and corporate image on patient satisfaction can be compared in terms of public and private hospitals.

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