

FOREIGN PATIENT CUSTOMER SATISFACTION WITH PRIVATE HOSPITAL SERVICE

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ABSTRACT: This research focuses on the customer satisfaction of foreign patients in regards to Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) at one private hospital to categorize five behaviors of service standards: Hearty, Empathy, Attention, Relationship, Trust and Overall Satisfaction. The data were collected from February to December 2008. The objectives of the research are to study foreign patients customer satisfaction with private hospital services in one private hospital and to identify factor criteria influence customer satisfaction. The result would be used as guidelines to improve the quality of service in behavior of all staff levels in the hospital and to increase customer satisfaction by using five main behaviors of service standards. Calculation determined a sample size of 4704. From the study, the level of customer satisfaction rated high in all categories: Hearty, Empathy, Attention, Relationship, Trust and Overall Satisfaction. The highest rank in overall performance from "Excellent" was in the category, Hearty with a rate of 73.4%. The next highest were Trust (73.2%) and Empathy (69.6%). Low ranks from customer satisfaction were Attention (64.8%) and Relationship (66.3%). Overall satisfaction was at 72.1% in this study. Patients will generally form an impression of the level of competence of the staff as they experience various services during their hospital visit. The customer satisfaction is upon the background, culture and experience. Further analysis and research are needed to study the customer satisfaction of each nation to customize the customer expectation to get better analysis of patient satisfaction among different nationality.

Keywords: customer satisfaction, foreign patient, private hospital

INTRODUCTION: Thailand has faced problems from numerous unfavorable factors from both external and internal fronts which affected overall business¹⁾. Whatever the external and domestic business trends will be, hospitals inevitably lead to increases in productivity and profitability. The economic contribution of the hospital list is determined by the reduction in cost, the impact on hospital reimbursement, and improvements in patient throughput²⁾. Therefore, the service arm intends to continue its improvement process of the patient cares and general services throughout organization³⁾. Of the Asian countries seeking to attract foreigners to their medical facilities, Thailand is by far the leading country¹⁾. The combination of low-cost and high-quality medical care is the main reason that many foreigners choose Thailand when seeking medical attention. Thus, this research studied customer satisfaction with one private hospital and determined the satisfaction factors to help providers understand what the customer need and set useful information for strategy to accept what the customers want.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted using secondary data collection focusing on the customer satisfaction of foreign patients in regards to Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) at one private hospital to categorize five behaviors of service standards:

- H-Hearty: Smile, Wai, Say appropriate greeting
- E-Empathy: Express concern for customers.
- A-Attention: Be attentive to customers, follow up, updates.
- R-Relationship: Recognize and remember customers, be positive, offer options.
- T-Trust: Professionalism and competence in services.

The study group was patients in both the In-Patient Department (IPD) and the Out-Patient Department (OPD). Calculation determined a sample size of 4704 collected from February to December 2008. Incomplete questionnaires are excluded from the criteria.

The questionnaire was developed and tested for reliability for few months at one private hospital before the hospital evaluation was started. Willing participants completed the questionnaire by themselves. A Chi-square test was performed

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Table 1 Number, Percentage and Mean of Satisfaction Levels, Overall (n=4704)

	Satisfaction					Mean
	Very poor (1)	Poor (2)	Fair (3)	Good (4)	Excellent (5)	
Hearty	3(.1)	11(.2)	108(2.3)	1130(24.0)	452(73.4)	4.70
Empathy	10(.2)	18(.4)	172(3.7)	1231(26.2)	3273(69.6)	4.65
Attention	20(.4)	40(.9)	309(6.6)	1286(27.3)	3049(64.8)	4.55
Relationship	15(.3)	29(.6)	238(5.1)	1303(27.7)	3119(66.3)	4.59
Trust	9(.2)	13(.3)	127(2.7)	1113(23.7)	3442(73.2)	4.69
Overall Satisfaction	6(.1)	15(.3)	112(2.4)	1179(25.1)	3392(72.1)	4.69

in an attempt to identify possible associations between sociodemographic characteristics and perception. It was also used to test for possible associations between satisfaction and unit, perception and overall satisfaction.

RESULTS: In this study, the total number of Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) collected from foreign patients is 4704 cases between February and December in 2008. The highest number was in August, 11.2%, while the lowest number was in October, 4.6%. The majority of cases were in the OPD, 3834 (81.5%). Only 870(18.5%) were in the IPD.

Regarding the customer satisfaction at each behavior and overall satisfaction, the highest satisfaction by mean were in Hearty (4.70), Trust (4.69) and Empathy (4.65). The lowest means were Attention (4.55) and Relationship (4.59), while overall satisfaction was at 4.69 (Table 1). This study sought to investigate the association between foreign patients' perception and demographic data. Perception were asked as "How do you feel about the service you received?" and grouped as "Excellent", "Good", "Fair", "Unsatisfaction" and "Need urgent improvement". The association determined by Chi-square test for demographic features of data showed no statistically significant relationship to perception levels, (p -value>0.05) for month and department.

The correlation between customer satisfaction of Hearty, Empathy, Attention, Relationship, Trust, overall satisfaction and unit showed statistically significant at p -value<0.05 The overall satisfaction is associated with level of perception of quality of service at p -value 0.001.

The highest Hearty rates were in International Travel Medicine Clinic (89.5%), X-ray (87.5%) and Spine Centre (81.5%). The lowest Hearty rates were Check-up Centre (52.3%), Pharmacy Unit (60.0%) and Internal Medicine Centre (63.4%).

The highest Empathy rates were in X-ray (100%), International Travel Medicine Clinic (86.0%) and Operation Room (79.9%). The lowest Empathy rates were in Check-up Centre (46.1%), Rehabilitation and Physical Therapy (50.0%) and Internal Medicine Centre (59.1%).

The highest Attention rates were in International Travel Medicine (83.7%), Pharmacy Unit (80.0%) and X-ray (75.0%). The lowest Attention rates were in Rehabilitation and Physical Therapy (40.0%), Check-up Centre (42.0%) and Ward 6A (54.6%).

The highest Relationship rates were in X-ray (100%), International Travel Medicine Clinic (83.7%) and Spine Centre (76.2%). The lowest rates were in Rehabilitation and Physical Therapy (40.0%), Check-up Centre (43.5%) and Ward 5A (54.8%).

The highest Trust rates were in X-ray (100%), International Travel Medicine Clinic (86.0%) and Intensive Care Unit (81.0%). The lowest Trust rates were in Check-up Centre (52.3%), Pharmacy Unit (60.0%) and Ward 5A (60.6%).

The highest Overall Satisfaction rates were in X-ray (100%), International Travel Medicine Clinic (88.4%) and Emergency Department (81.9%). The lowest Overall Satisfaction rates were in Check-up Centre (50.3%), Ward 5A (59.6%), Rehabilitation and Physical Therapy and Pharmacy Unit (60.0%).

DISCUSSION: From the study, the level of customer satisfaction rated high in all categories: Hearty, Empathy, Attention, Relationship, Trust and Overall Satisfaction. The highest satisfaction by mean were in Hearty (4.70), Trust (4.69) and Empathy (4.65). The lowest means were Attention (4.55) and Relationship (4.59), while overall satisfaction was at 4.69.

It demonstrated that Thai culture is traditionally firmly based in appearing demure and making others feel comfortable. Thai culture as a passive or “soft” culture. When it is applied to the medical community, patients may be either more or less important socially, as dependant on their status outside the hospital. For some providers, there are efforts to treat all patients equally, regardless of their social standing.

As for low means in Attention and Relationship, ongoing improvement in communication skills among practitioners is an essential component of a safety culture.

Developing systems that minimize the chance of error by improving communication and learning from mistakes, instead of placing blame, is critical. For instance, when things go wrong there is an ethical obligation on the part of health care providers to maintain open and honest communication with the patient and family. Having a multidisciplinary approach in place to establish the basic clinical facts is essential. Generally speaking, most patients want to know three things: (1) how it happened; (2) that their caregivers care about them sincerely and will not abandon them in their time of need; and (3) what steps will be taken so that they will know their current condition and not time consuming⁴).

From the research, the number of foreign patients showed a noticeable decrease in October 2008, possibly due to Thailand’s political conflict which has reduced the investors’ confidence and investments have been deferred. It was the result of the decrease in private sector investments in the last year.

The result showed that the unit is the influence factor on customer satisfaction of Hearty, Empathy, Attention, Relationship and Trust. The lowest Overall Satisfaction rates were in Check-up Centre (50.3%), Ward 5A (59.6%),

Rehabilitation and Physical Therapy and Pharmacy Unit (60.0%). This may be due to insufficient staffs and environment of those units. Recommendations at this point were regarding practices of staff in following the hospital standards of service; staffs need greater training in relation to their duties.

The association between “How do you feel about the service you received?” and overall satisfaction towards staff’s service behaviors was statistically significant at p-value less than 0.05. This result means that service providers behaviors influences foreign patients’ perception.

RECOMMENDATION: The high competition in hospital market, both domestic and international markets, leads to all hospitals have to realize to improve their service quality⁵). As Thailand, wants to be “Health Tourism Hub of Asia”. To respond to the customer satisfaction is the important way to attract the customer from other countries.

Conveying an image of physician competence to customers is perhaps a more challenging task⁶). To develop and maintain hospitals image, hospital staff must rely on the experience attributable to competence at work.

Patients will generally form an impression of the level of competence of the staff as they experience various services during their hospital visit. Efforts must, therefore, be devoted to making every patient experience a positive one to build and reinforce the belief among them that the staff is competent. One way of achieving this is through training programmes that must be designed to reinforce the need to incorporate this mode of thinking among all the hospital staff. Moreover, hospital management should reward those units with higher patient satisfaction so that the units with less satisfied patients have some incentives to work better for higher patient satisfaction.

From the result showed the foreigner were less satisfied in two out of five factors of service behaviors, attention and relationship dimension. It is the warning sign to the private hospital to improve the service quality.

The result also show that improving the quality of communication with patients by explaining medical procedures, discussing questions of concern, and by consulting with them regarding their care can greatly enhance customer satisfaction. Patients were satisfied with professionals who gave customers individual attention and understood their needs. Moreover, employees dealing with patients in a caring fashion and having the patient's interest at heart are important service issues.

Nowadays, the consumers have been marked by a shift in emphasis from curative medicine to preventive medicine. Preventive medicine focused on health of individuals and the community in order to protect, promote and maintain health, prevent disease, disability and premature death. So, hospital should set the approach strategy to response of the market trend such as set new campaign to serve customer who interest their healthy.

In addition, this study was based at one private hospital only where the majority of foreign patients come from the United States and Europe. Future studies should be performed in private hospitals that have various nationalities of foreign patient to get better analysis of patient satisfaction among different nationality and should study the customer satisfaction of each nation to customize the customer expectation because the customer satisfaction is also upon the background, culture and experience.

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