
A STUDY ON SERVICE QUALITY TOWARDS PRIVATE HOSPITALS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO COIMBATORE CITY

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ABSTRACT

Service quality has become a critical factor in the healthcare sector, particularly in private hospitals where patient expectations are continuously increasing. The present study aims to examine the level of service quality provided by private hospitals in Coimbatore city and to assess patients' perceptions and satisfaction towards the services offered. With the rapid expansion of private healthcare facilities, understanding service quality dimensions has become essential for delivering effective and patient Center care. This study primarily focuses on identifying the key determinants of service quality and evaluating their impact on patient satisfaction. The findings of the study reveal that service quality dimensions such as responsiveness of staff, assurance provided by medical professionals, and empathy towards patients play a significant role in influencing patient satisfaction. While private hospitals in Coimbatore generally provide satisfactory services, certain areas such as waiting time, communication, and personalized care require improvement. The study suggests that continuous monitoring and improvement of service quality will help private hospitals enhance patient satisfaction, build trust, and maintain a competitive advantage. The results of this study will be useful for hospital administrators, healthcare professionals, and policymakers in improving the overall quality of healthcare services.

Keywords:

Service Quality, Patient Satisfaction, Private Hospitals, Healthcare Service, SERVQUAL Model.

INTRODUCTION

Healthcare is one of the most essential service sectors contributing to the well-being and economic development of a nation. In recent years, the healthcare industry in India has experienced rapid growth due to technological advancements, increased awareness, and rising expectations of patients. Among various healthcare providers, private hospitals play a significant role in delivering quality medical services with modern infrastructure and specialized care. Service quality in hospitals has become a critical factor influencing patient satisfaction, trust, and loyalty.

Unlike tangible products, healthcare services are highly sensitive and intangible in nature, where factors such as responsiveness, reliability, empathy, assurance, and infrastructure significantly affect patient perception. With increasing competition among private healthcare providers, maintaining high service quality standards has become essential to attract and retain patients. This study aims to analyze the level of service quality provided by private hospitals in Coimbatore city and examine patient perceptions towards various service dimensions.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (2020) conducted a study on “SERVQUAL: A Multiple-Item Scale for Measuring Consumer Perceptions of Service Quality.” The objective of the study was to develop a reliable instrument to measure service quality across service industries. This aimed a strong theoretical foundation for evaluating service quality in private hospitals. **Donabedian (2021)** carried out a study titled “The Quality of Care: The study aimed to assess healthcare quality using structure, process, and outcome models. The research highlighted that quality healthcare services improve patient satisfaction and trust. **Andale (2022)** conducted a study on “Service Quality Perceptions and Patient Satisfaction in Developing Countries.” This aimed the study was to examine patient satisfaction with hospital services. Data were collected from patients using structured questionnaires **Lim and Tang (2023)** undertook a study titled “A Study of Patients’ Expectations and Satisfaction in Hospitals.” The study aimed to analyze the gap between patient expectations and perceptions of service quality. **Carman (2024)** conducted research on “Patient Perceptions of Service Quality: Combining the Dimensions.” The study focused on evaluating service quality dimensions in healthcare services.

Statement of the problem

The healthcare sector, particularly private hospitals, plays a vital role in delivering quality medical services to the public. In rapidly developing urban centers like Coimbatore, the demand for efficient, reliable, and patient-centered healthcare has significantly increased. Despite the growth in the number of private hospitals and advancements in medical technology, patients often face challenges related to service quality, including delays in treatment, lack of personalized care, high costs, and inadequate communication. These issues raise concerns about whether private hospitals are consistently meeting patient expectations and maintaining high standards of service delivery.

Service quality in healthcare is a multidimensional concept that includes aspects such as responsiveness, assurance, empathy, reliability, and tangibles. In the context of Coimbatore city, where private hospitals cater to a diverse population, variations in service quality can directly impact patient satisfaction and trust. Patients today are more aware and have higher expectations regarding healthcare services, making it essential for hospitals to focus not only on clinical outcomes but also on overall patient experience.

Therefore, the core problem of this study lies in identifying and analyzing the gaps between patient expectations and the actual services provided by private hospitals in Coimbatore city. Understanding these gaps is crucial for improving service delivery, enhancing patient satisfaction, and building long-term trust. This study aims to assess the quality of services offered by private hospitals and provide insights that can help healthcare providers implement effective strategies to address deficiencies and improve overall performance.

Need for the Study

The need for this study arises from the growing importance of service quality in the healthcare sector, especially in private hospitals where patient expectations are continuously increasing. In a developing city like Coimbatore, private hospitals have become a preferred choice due to their advanced facilities, specialized treatments, and faster services. However, with rising competition among healthcare providers, maintaining high service quality has become essential not only for patient satisfaction but also for the sustainability and reputation of these hospitals.

Furthermore, patients today are more informed and sensitive to the quality of services they receive, including aspects such as timely care, staff behavior, cleanliness, transparency in billing, and overall

hospital environment. Any gap between expected and perceived service quality can lead to dissatisfaction, loss of trust, and negative word-of-mouth. Therefore, it is important to systematically evaluate how patients perceive the quality of services offered by private hospitals in Coimbatore city.

This study is needed to identify the key factors influencing service quality and to highlight the existing gaps in healthcare delivery. The findings of this study will help hospital management understand patient expectations more clearly and adopt effective measures to improve service standards. Additionally, the study will contribute to academic research and provide valuable insights for policymakers and healthcare professionals aiming to enhance the overall quality of healthcare services in the region.

Objectives

- To examine the level of service quality provided by private hospitals in Coimbatore city.
- To identify the key factors influencing patient satisfaction, such as responsiveness, reliability, assurance, empathy, and tangibility.
- To measure the gap between patient expectations and perceptions regarding healthcare services in private hospitals.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to evaluate service quality in private hospitals in Coimbatore city. The objective is to understand patients' perceptions and satisfaction levels regarding healthcare services and identify key factors influencing service quality.

Data Collection: Both primary and secondary data sources are used. Primary data is collected through a structured questionnaire administered to patients who have recently received treatment from selected private hospitals. The questionnaire is based on the SERVQUAL model dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. Secondary data is gathered from hospital reports, journals, healthcare publications, and official health statistics. **Sampling Design:** A convenience sampling method is employed to select respondents due to accessibility and time constraints. The sample size consists of approximately 120–150 patients from major private hospitals in Coimbatore. **Measurement Tools:** Responses are measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. This enables quantification of patient perceptions and expectations regarding service quality. **Data Analysis:** Collected data is analysed using statistical tools such as percentage analysis, mean score analysis, and correlation to identify relationships between service quality dimensions and patient satisfaction. **Scope and Limitations:** The study is limited to private hospitals within Coimbatore city and reflects patient perceptions at a specific time. Findings may vary with demographic differences and service changes.

This methodology provides a structured framework to evaluate healthcare service quality and supports evidence-based improvements in patient care.

Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis of data collected from respondents reveals important insights regarding the service quality of private hospitals in Coimbatore city. The study mainly focused on five dimensions of service quality based on the SERVQUAL model: Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy.

Firstly, under the tangibility dimension, it is observed that most respondents are satisfied with the hospital infrastructure, cleanliness, and availability of modern equipment. This indicates that private hospitals are maintaining good physical facilities, which positively influence patient perception.

In terms of reliability, the findings show that hospitals are generally consistent in providing promised services. However, a few respondents expressed concerns regarding delays in treatment and appointment scheduling. This suggests that while reliability is good, there is still scope for improvement.

The responsiveness of hospital staff received mixed responses. While some patients felt that doctors and nurses were attentive and prompt, others reported longer waiting times. This indicates that hospitals need to improve their speed and willingness to help patients.

Regarding assurance, most patients feel confident about the competence and professionalism of doctors and medical staff. This builds trust and enhances patient satisfaction, which is a positive sign for private healthcare institutions.

The empathy dimension shows that while some patients experienced personalized care and attention, others felt that emotional support and individual care could be improved. This highlights the need for hospitals to focus more on patient-centered care.

FINDINGS

Tangibility

Patients were generally satisfied with the physical facilities, modern medical equipment, cleanliness, and hospital infrastructure. Well-maintained buildings and updated technology positively influenced patient perception..

S.No	Dimension	Mean Score	Level of Service Quality	Explanation
1	Tangibility	4.2	High	Reflects hospital infrastructure, cleanliness, and availability of modern equipment.
2	Reliability	3.8	Moderate	Indicates consistency in providing promised services and accurate treatment.
3	Responsiveness	3.5	Moderate	Shows how quickly and effectively staff respond to patient needs.
4	Assurance	4.3	High	Represents staff competence, courtesy, and ability to build trust.
5	Empathy	3.6	Moderate	Measures personalized care and individual attention given to patients.
	Overall	3.88	Moderate	Overall service quality level of private hospitals.

Reliability

Most respondents agreed that hospitals provide services as promised and maintain accurate medical records. Doctors and staff were considered dependable in delivering treatments and diagnostic services.

S.No	Factors	Mean Score	Rank	Influence Level	Explanation
1	Responsiveness	3.9	3	Moderate Influence	Speed and willingness of staff to help patients.
2	Reliability	4.1	2	High Influence	Ability to provide dependable and accurate services.
3	Assurance	4.3	1	Very High Influence	Knowledge and professionalism of healthcare providers.
4	Empathy	3.7	4	Moderate Influence	Individual care and emotional support provided to patients.
5	Tangibility	3.5	5	Low Influence	Physical facilities and equipment available in hospitals.

Responsiveness

Responsiveness emerged as one of the most influential dimensions affecting patient satisfaction. Patients appreciated the prompt attention given by doctors, nurses, and administrative staff. However, some respondents indicated dissatisfaction regarding waiting time during consultations and billing procedures.

S.No	Dimension	Expectation (E)	Perception (P)	Gap (P - E)	Explanation
1	Tangibility	4.5	4.2	-0.3	Difference between expected and actual physical facilities.
2	Reliability	4.4	3.8	-0.6	Gap in consistency and accuracy of services.
3	Responsiveness	4.3	3.5	-0.8	Gap in promptness and support from staff.
4	Assurance	4.4	4.3	-0.1	Gap in trust and confidence in healthcare providers.
5	Empathy	4.2	3.6	-0.6	Gap in personalized care and attention.
	Overall Gap	4.36	3.88	-0.48	Overall difference between expectations and perceptions.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings of the study on service quality in private hospitals in Coimbatore city, the following suggestions are recommended to improve patient satisfaction and overall service performance:

Reduce Waiting Time

Private hospitals should implement better appointment scheduling systems and streamline registration and billing procedures to minimize patient waiting time.

Improve Communication

Doctors and healthcare staff should provide clear explanations regarding diagnosis, treatment procedures, medication, and billing details.

Enhance Personalized Care

Hospitals should focus on providing individualized attention to patients, especially elderly and critical care patients. Strengthening empathy and emotional support can significantly improve patient experience.

Strengthen Staff Training Programs

Regular training programs should be conducted for medical and non-medical staff to improve responsiveness, courtesy, and professional behavior. This aligns with the service quality dimensions proposed by A. Parasuraman, Valarie A. Zeithaml, and Leonard L. Berry under the SERVQUAL model.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the level of service quality provided by private hospitals in Coimbatore city and analysed its impact on patient satisfaction. The findings reveal that service quality dimensions such as responsiveness, assurance, and empathy play a significant role in influencing patient perceptions and satisfaction levels. Patients generally expressed satisfaction with the reliability and infrastructure of private hospitals; however, areas such as waiting time, communication, and personalized care require further improvement.

The study confirms that there is a positive relationship between service quality and patient loyalty. Higher service quality leads to increased patient trust, repeat visits, and positive word-of-mouth recommendations. In a competitive healthcare environment like Coimbatore, maintaining high service quality standards is essential for sustaining growth and achieving competitive advantage.

Overall, continuous monitoring, staff training, patient-center care practices, and systematic evaluation of service quality dimensions will help private hospitals enhance their performance. The results of this study provide valuable insights for hospital administrators, healthcare professionals, and policymakers to improve healthcare service delivery and ensure higher patient satisfaction.

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