

Assessing The Effectiveness Of Patient Satisfaction And Retention Strategies In Health Care Institutions

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Abstract: In every country, one of the sectors that are very important to its economic development is its health care delivery system. As a result of the fact that the goals of most hospitals are to obtain and retain its patients, they try to establish systems and structures that place them in high competitive positions. For every health care institution to win the loyalty and possibly retain most of their patients, practitioners and researchers have revealed that there should be some elements and strategies needed to retain majority of the patients who come to the hospital to seek treatment. And this paper seeks to assess the effective use of patient satisfaction and patient retention strategies in healthcare institutions.

Keywords; Patient satisfaction, Patient retention, healthcare, physician-patient relationship

1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary times, healthcare delivery services at the various health facilities and organizations have become critical. As a result of this development, healthcare organizations treat people who come to their outfit with a high sense of professionalism by drawing a link of network of healthcare providers and healthcare facilities. In recent times, services at the healthcare institutions have changed as a result of the demands of the patients who come to the hospitals. Most patients who visit healthcare institutions want to have the freedom to access their own healthcare providers that they may wish. After patients have received a better healthcare from the healthcare institutions, they go further to compare the customer satisfaction services received from other health centers to the services they have received from the current hospital. In order to make most of the patients happy at the healthcare institutions, there should be an easy access to healthcare service systems, better care, and affordable cost at the hospitals. For instance, according to [1] the government of United Kingdom (UK), in November 2015, decided to spend an extra fund of 3.8bn which is about 4% increase on the NHS of England's 10bn frontline budget. The government of U.K was doing all of this to show its support to increase the annual 8 billion pounds budget by 2020. Even though researchers believe this may still fall short of adequate field gaps in funding, the government believe that the idea of providing enough funds will go a long way to supporting the idea of healthcare professionalism. This would also help to acquire knowledge and skills necessary to attract and retain patients.

Furthermore, it would better encourage healthcare providers to maintain a competitive edge in the United Kingdom public healthcare. Recent research by [2] show that approximately 84% of the population in the United State of America (USA) are covered by either public (26%) or private (70%) of some type of a managed healthcare system, with the balance consisting of traditional fee-for-service plans and the uninsured. Findings have also indicated about 45% of the age 19 to 64 are inadequately insured in the USA [3]. The reasons include the following; (1) the current administration and congress have tried to revive the affordable Care Act, (2) change of employment by the member, (3) switching managed care providers by the employer, (4) lack of convenience, quality care, limited number of physicians offered by the healthcare organization, and (5) unemployment. This paper reveals all the issues connected to patient satisfaction and dissatisfaction. It would also reveal the attitudes of patients' displeasure that would result in the movement to other health institutions. This paper evaluates the strategies that a healthcare institution could adapt to the satisfaction of their patients in order to win their loyalty and eventually lead to their retention.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Modern day patients are more knowledgeable on healthcare issues that include; procedures, processes and treatment of diseases and illness. The knowledge base of the patient on healthcare issues at the healthcare institution has come as a result of the social media and the Internet [4]. This has resulted in the undergoing change on patient's attitude towards healthcare and healthcare providers. Currently, patients have easy access to their doctors who they may have an open interaction with on their health issues [5]. This is a break from the old idea of physician-patient relationship that used to exist. Healthcare system is about the life of an individual that is very delicate to deal with. The healthcare industry is known to offer a special service that has a certain degree of higher standard of service quality as compared to that of other industries. The socio-economic wellbeing of any country is linked to the quality of healthcare in that country. According to [6] if a

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managed care organization loses such a number of citizens, then it would go a long way in affecting their annual revenue. A study by [7] reveals that patients who want to take part in any health care insurance plan would do so on the basis of some qualities. This may include the number of doctors on the managed care organization system, the drugs prescription that the insurance plan will cover, the cost the patients will incur if he/she has to visit the hospital on regular basis, how much would the treatment at the hospital cost the patient monthly. Furthermore, patients would look for the qualification and qualities of the doctors on the healthcare organization system, a dental scheduler, patient would choose their own hospitals, healthcare managed organization system and visual care provider also. The choosing preference of healthcare insurance plan would depend on the patient who is going to take the managed care organization system [8]. The country or the community where the patient lives would have an influence on choices of the health care managed system. To achieve patient satisfaction in hospitals, the above characteristics should be enforced within the managed care organization system. But in all, what do the patient expect from the healthcare provider? According to the [9] patients normally move from one healthcare system to the other due to a lot of factors. The study shows that a number of participants changed primary healthcare providers during the period of the study. In the study of [10] it was revealed that the patients were changing doctors at the primary healthcare because of the quality of doctor-patient relationship. The researchers for this study conclude that quality healthcare could be defined as the access a patient may have with a healthcare provider on a timely manner and the quality of interpersonal relationship that would exist between the healthcare providers and the patient. According to [11] interpersonal relationship between the doctor and the patients could be seen on how well the doctor knows the patient, the trust the patient would have in the doctors, and the faithful communication that would exist between the doctor and the patients. Furthermore, [12] believe that quality communication and trust will lead to patient satisfaction and this is seen as the predictor of patient retention in healthcare institution. Another factor that has been seen by the society, as a problem to the doctor-patient relationship is communication [13]. Most of the patients and doctors in the healthcare institutions are becoming more frustrated because of the changing nature of the managed healthcare system [14]. According to [15] the relationship between a doctor and their patient has culminated into a lot of problems because of time constraints and the fact that doctors should spend much time on a larger number of patients at a time. This has prevented doctors from developing good relationship with their patients. A study conducted by [16] on doctor-patient communication revealed that when there is bad communication between the doctor and patients, it influences the overall medical management of the patients negatively. The improvement of the communication skills of the doctors at the healthcare institution would help in enhancing the doctor-patient relationship at the hospitals; however, one of the reasons that have posed a lot of threat to this fact is time constraint. For the doctor to respect and have compassion for the patients, the doctor should have developed a good communication link with the patient [17]. Patients regard a doctor who care for them as the one who help them with

information on their healthcare issues, give them good treatment and provide guidance concerning their healthcare through educative information [18]. According to [19], to manage the risk at the healthcare institution, there should be effective communication. This would influence patient satisfaction, treatment compliance and considerably, lower the risk of lawsuit from patients who may have problems with the healthcare institutions. For the doctor to build a strong relationship with the patients, the doctors must possess some characteristics. One of such characteristics is trust. Trust is one of the attributes that patients look out from a doctor because it is one of the efficient and effective aids in patient satisfaction and the retention of patients. A study conducted by [20] reveals some of the attributes in doctors which will develop patient's trust. The finding indicated that a patient who builds trust in a doctor is based on the comfort and care they get from the doctor at the healthcare institution. Patients look at how knowledgeable the doctor is in the line of duty. Lastly, it was revealed that patients build trust in a doctor when they see that such a doctor listens and respects his patients. One other problem facing healthcare institutions is the provision of quality healthcare delivery, which is an issue that needs to be continuously solved in order to satisfy and retain the patients who come to the hospitals. In providing quality healthcare delivery, it is not the doctor alone who does everything at the hospital but the doctor is been helped by other supporting medical and non-medical staff at the healthcare institutions. Before a patient may see the doctor, these medical and non-medical staff is the first point of call. One of these non-medical sections is the administration staff, whose work is to set up goals for the hospital and develop strategies that would help the healthcare institution to provide good and excellent services to the patients who come to the healthcare institution to seek treatment. One of the best strategically accepted philosophies that a healthcare institution could adopt is from [21] who stated that, an institution need to employ the best people, imbue the employees with the institutional philosophy and values. Thus, the administration need to facilitate the training and motivation of the employees, identify and reward hard working employees for their diligence in duty, The administration of healthcare institution should challenge its employees by allowing them to learn from new experiences. And lastly, the administrators of the healthcare institution should pay the medical and non-medical staff well in order to improve their life, which would encourage the staff to work hard. If all these strategic points are put in place, it would make a great impact on the institution. Most patients who come to the hospital anticipate that they will receive the best of quality healthcare delivery at the healthcare institution. As a result of this, medical and non-medical staff at the healthcare institutions should know what the patients who visit the hospital for treatment want. Another area that needs to be considered is patient satisfaction and dissatisfaction and its effect on the economical stand of the hospital. When patients are satisfied, they would always come back to the same healthcare institution, which would go a long way to influencing the revenue of the healthcare institutions positively. On the other hand, when patients are dissatisfied with the quality of service delivery at the hospital, it affects the hospitals revenue. According to [21] when patients who comes the hospital are able to alert

the administration of the hospital about their grievances, the probability is that more than twenty-four other patients are equally upset but these patients may not voice out their grievances. When the patient's complaints are not heard by the administration of the hospital, that patient may inform ten other people of the bad service render at the hospital but when the grievances are solved by the administration of the hospital, the patient is likely to inform only five persons[22]. According to[23] higher percentage of patients whose complaints are resolve are more likely to come back for treatment at the same healthcare institution. In the study of[24] it was revealed that hospital administration will spend more than five times the resources to gain a new patient as compared to spending less to retain old patients. When a patient is dissatisfied with the procedure and process at the hospital and decides not to come the hospital for treatment again[25] it means that the hospital has lose their preliminary investment, which may result in the hospital losing the friends and relatives of the patient also. Furthermore, according to[26] patients who are loyal to a particular hospital are less costly to retain because the patients are familiar with the procedures and processes at the hospital, the patient know the service quality delivery that are provided by the hospital and what the hospital also expect from the patients. Because of these, the hospital may receive small amount of complains from patients on procedural delay and some inconveniences that will happen at the hospital which may not be of great cost to the hospital[27]. [28]was of the view that dissatisfaction does not prevent the patient from coming to the same hospital but when the hospital continuously repeat the same mistakes, then a patient may be forced to go to another hospital for treatment. When there is continuity of behavior that provokes patient satisfaction, researchers call it employee/patient satisfaction mirror, which means that when a patient is not happy, it makes the medical personnel unhappy too[28]. This has been explained by researchers and practitioners as loss of interest in a particular hospital by patients as a result of continuous dissatisfaction of the service delivery which may lead the patients to go another hospital. The voicing out of patient's grievances will lead to the dissatisfaction of the medical personnel who may end up resigning from the hospital. In both situation, the hospital will be affected because it will take some amount of finance to retain new patient or bring the lose ones and the medical personnel resigning means that the hospital will need some capital to replace the unhappy resigned personnel. Compared to the studies on patient satisfaction, patient retention has not been giving the needed attention by researchers. But studies have shown that there is a relationship between satisfaction and retention. According to[29] the continuous experience of satisfaction by a patient will lead to the loyalty of the patient, which may end in the retention of the patient to the hospital.[30]positedthat there are many basic strategies that healthcare institution can adopt in order to retain most of the patients who visit the hospital. This may include having well schedulers on making phone call appointments with their patients[31]. The telecommunication network at a hospital should be clear; patients should not be put on hold for more than 15 minutes. If these situations continue for some time, the patients may look for treatment from other healthcare institutions. The best strategy that any healthcare institution can adopt to improve their telecommunication system is

seeking ideas from the patients and the medical and non-medical staff [32]. Another strategies a hospital can adopt in order to receive their patient's complains and requests are; the medical or non-medical personnel who will make calls to the patients should show some form of respect and courtesy when communicating with the patient. They have to exhibitsome level of knowledge on the medical techniques if the personnelare not a medical staff, the personnel at the call center should be able to evaluate the demands of the patients who calls, they should have the courage to react fast to emergency situations on the phone, and lastly, the personnel should have the skills in communication to keep the patient waiting if he/she has to attend to another thing for a short time. According to [33] appointment of scheduler at the hospital with the medical personnel should be easily accessible to the patient who want to visit the hospital for treatment. The hospital administration should prevent patients from waiting for a longer period for a normal routine checkup appointment with a doctor[34]. The hospital administration should create a conducive and suitable environment at the hospital so that patients who have an appointment at the hospital will feel comfortable during their time at the healthcare facility. Things to impress a patient upon his/her first visit to the facility may include the beautification of the environment, the car park, painting of the building of the hospital, sign board the show the direction and department at the hospital, the sitting arrangement of the waiting area the greetings, beautiful and friendly smile a patient may receive from a medical or non-medical staff will help the patient to know the values of the hospital. According to [35] before a doctor meets a patient, the doctor should have some basic knowledge about the patient, doctor should have known about the reason the patient is visiting the hospital, when doctors prove that they have some knowledge regarding the patient's issue, it will prove to the patient about the care that the doctor has for them. Doctors should make the patients who visit the hospital feel very special. For the doctors to remove all hindrance, they should try and make the patients feel at home, doctors should ensure eye contact when speaking to the patients, and doctors should listen attentively when the patientsare talking. These are of much importance to maintain patient satisfaction and retention. Healthcare institutions that want to win the loyalty of the patients who come for treatment at the hospital should try and use the aforementioned approaches or strategies. Moreover, if the hospitals want to establish service excellence, then they need to develop quality service delivery culture and philosophy of appointing quality leadership at the hospitals[33]. In the study of[36] they revealed that for any service vision to triumph, the institution should have a unified service vision and the skills of the staff should be identified. The hospital should setup well-qualified medical and non-medical service team; which may include the doctors, nurses, and administrators. Also, there should be a goal to be attained by the hospital, there should be well-planned strategies for the hospital to achieve, there should be patient quality service delivery philosophy, the hospital should have a monitoring and evaluation system in place to check the staff and their goals, and lastly due to modernization and technology, there should be regular training and seminars for both medical and non-medical staff at the hospitals as proposed by [37].

CONCLUSION

For any healthcare institution to become successful, it should be able to maintain the satisfaction of patients and also have the ability to retain most of their patients. Patients become satisfied when they receive quality healthcare from qualified medical and non-medical staff and a respectable environment also. Again, where there is cordial relationship between the staff and the patients, loyalty and retention to the health facility increases. The success of healthcare institutions measured by the how the patients are treated, how the revenue collected are put into judicious use, and how service quality delivery strategies to keep the patient satisfaction and retention are managed.

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