

Role of Satisfaction with Health Care Services in Increasing Patient Loyalty: an Ambulatory Setting

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Abstract

Background: Health care providers must be able to provide services that can satisfy the patient. This encourages patient loyalty so that competitiveness can be preserved. This study aimed to examine the correlation of patients' satisfaction to their loyalty towards health care facilities.

Methods: An analytic cross-sectional study was conducted on 50 respondents from Anggrek Specialist Polyclinic at Dr. Hasan Sadikin General Hospital Bandung (ambulatory setting) who met the inclusion criteria during the period of September to October 2014. Questionnaires that had been validated and tested for reliability were used. Rank Spearman test was used to analyze the correlation between patient satisfaction and patient loyalty. This study used five dimensions of service quality to measure patient satisfaction, i.e. tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

Results: The study showed that most (84%) patients felt unsatisfied and only 14% was loyal towards the health care services they received. Satisfaction and loyalty showed positive correlation with $p=0.001$ ($p<0.05$) and $r=0.439$, which showed a moderate correlation.

Conclusions: There is significant correlation between patient satisfaction and loyalty in Anggrek Specialist Polyclinic at Dr. Hasan Sadikin Hospital. This study can be an evaluative material for health care providers to encourage improvement of service quality as to increase patient satisfaction and loyalty.

Keywords: Ambulatory, health care service, patient loyalty, patient satisfaction

Introduction

Health care services as public services are highly dynamic in improving services to the response of changing consumers' demand and tight competition among them.¹ In doing so, every health care service institution try to provide quality health services. One of the instruments to measure the quality of health care services commonly used is the Service Quality (SERVQUAL) by Parasuraman et al. in Fandy Tjiptono and Gregorius Chandra², the facets of SERVQUAL are tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

Hospitals are one of the health care service providers which has the principle of trust, hence their success is highly depended on the service quality, patient's satisfaction, and loyalty.³ Satisfaction is the feeling which comes after comparing one's expectations and perceived experience. The measurement of

patient's satisfaction can produce a result that reflects patient's perception and is a strong basis to improve service quality.⁴

Fandy Tjiptono and Gregorius Chandra² mentioned that customer satisfaction is correlated positively with their loyalty and can potentially lead to increase income of the hospitals in the long term. This study was carried out to examine the correlation between patient satisfaction and their loyalty towards health care services in an ambulatory setting.

Methods

This was an analytic observational study with a cross-sectional approach. This study had been approved by the Health Research Ethics Committee of Dr. Hasan Sadikin General Hospital Bandung. The population in this study was all patients who visited Anggrek Specialist

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Polyclinic at Dr. Hasan Sadikin Hospital Bandung. Consecutive sampling was used to select 50 respondents during September and October 2014. The respondents who met the criteria were selected until the amount of the sample was fulfilled. The inclusion criteria in this study were: outpatients on the third visit or more to Anggrek Specialist Polyclinic, patients who came for check-up and patients who were older than 18 years old. Patients who refused to participate in this study were excluded.

The instrument used was a questionnaire which had been tested for its validity and reliability prior to its use. The questionnaire consisted of 25 questions to measure satisfaction: 5 questions for each dimension of service quality. This questionnaire enquired about both the patient's expectation and perceived experience. While to measure loyalty, there were 4 questions. The questionnaire

was designed in the form of Likert scale with options: "agree to a large extent", "agree", "disagree", and "disagree to a large extent".

The variables examined in this study were patient satisfaction and loyalty. Satisfaction could be measured in the five dimensions of service quality i.e. tangible (physical facility), reliability (ability to provide the promised service), responsiveness (willingness to assist customers), assurance (employees' knowledge, manner, and trustworthiness), and empathy (care towards the customers). Satisfaction was measured by using gap analysis, which means the difference between the expectation score and the perceived experience score.⁵ The lower the gap, the higher the level of satisfaction is and vice versa. The gap score was categorized into three levels of satisfaction: highly satisfied (gap < 0), satisfied (gap = 0), and dissatisfied (gap > 0). Patient's loyalty was measured by summing up the scores from each question

Table 1 Respondent's Characteristic Distribution

| Respondent's Characteristic | n | % |
|--|----|----|
| Sex | | |
| Male | 13 | 26 |
| Female | 37 | 74 |
| Age | | |
| <30 years old | 13 | 26 |
| 30-39 years old | 11 | 22 |
| 40-49 years old | 8 | 16 |
| >50 years old | 18 | 36 |
| Education | | |
| No formal Education | 0 | 0 |
| Basic Education (Elementary, Middle School) | 5 | 10 |
| Middle-level Education (middle school, economic and middle school, school of machinery techniques) | 14 | 28 |
| Higher Education (diploma, undergraduate) | 31 | 62 |
| Occupation | | |
| Housewives | 12 | 24 |
| Students | 8 | 16 |
| Civil servants/army/police | 10 | 20 |
| Employees in private sector | 8 | 16 |
| Self-employed | 4 | 8 |
| Retirees | 4 | 8 |
| Others | 3 | 6 |
| Unemployed | 1 | 2 |

Table 2 Respondents Distribution based on Satisfaction Level

| Satisfaction Level | Respondents | |
|--------------------|---------------|----------------|
| | Frequency (f) | Percentage (%) |
| Highly Satisfied | 5 | 10 |
| Satisfied | 3 | 6 |
| Unsatisfied | 42 | 84 |
| Total | 50 | 100 |

and then categorized into three: loyal (>75%), slightly disloyal (50-75%), and disloyal (<50%).

The data was analyzed using computer software. The non-parametric statistical analysis used the rank Spearman test since the measured variables were ordinal in nature. This analysis was used to check for any correlation between patient satisfaction and loyalty towards health care services in Anggrek Specialist Polyclinic at Dr. Hasan

Sadikin General Hospital Bandung. The correlation would be considered significant if $p < 0.05$, and r value was used to examine the strength and direction of correlation based on Guilford criteria.

Results

The result showed that the majority (74%) of the respondents were female. Based on the

Table 3 Satisfaction Distribution Based on Dimensions of Service Quality

| Dimension of Satisfaction | Respondents | |
|---------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| | Frequency (f) | Percentage (%) |
| Tangibles | | |
| Highly Satisfied | 2 | 4 |
| Satisfied | 10 | 20 |
| Dissatisfied | 38 | 76 |
| Reliability | | |
| Highly Satisfied | 1 | 2 |
| Satisfied | 15 | 30 |
| Dissatisfied | 34 | 68 |
| Responsiveness | | |
| Highly Satisfied | 4 | 8 |
| Satisfied | 25 | 50 |
| Dissatisfied | 21 | 42 |
| Assurance | | |
| Highly Satisfied | 11 | 22 |
| Satisfied | 20 | 40 |
| Dissatisfied | 9 | 38 |
| Empathy | | |
| Highly Satisfied | 4 | 8 |
| Satisfied | 33 | 66 |
| Dissatisfied | 13 | 26 |

Table 4 Respondents Distribution Based on Loyalty

| Loyalty | Respondents | |
|---------------------|---------------|----------------|
| | Frequency (f) | Percentage (%) |
| Loyalty | 7 | 14 |
| Slightly disloyalty | 43 | 86 |
| Disloyalty | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 50 | 100 |

Table 5 Correlation between Satisfaction and Loyalty

| Dimension | Loyalty | | Slightly Disloyal | | Disloyal | | r | P |
|------------------|---------|-----|-------------------|-----|----------|-----|-------|-------|
| | (f) | (%) | (f) | (%) | (f) | (%) | | |
| Highly Satisfied | 2 | 40 | 3 | 60 | 0 | 0 | 0,439 | 0,001 |
| Satisfied | 2 | 67 | 1 | 33 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Unsatisfied | 3 | 7 | 39 | 93 | 0 | 0 | | |

age groups, a large proportion (36%) was in the >50 years age group. Most respondents (62%) were with higher education and none of them was without formal education. Based on their occupation, the largest proportion was housewife, followed by civil servant, army, and police; there were also some respondents who were unemployed (Table 1). About 10% of respondents were highly satisfied over the health care service given by Anggrek Specialist Polyclinic, while the majority (84%) was unsatisfied (Table 2).

If satisfaction was observed according to the service quality dimensions, Empathy and Assurance would be the dimensions with the smallest gap between expectation and perceived experience. Most respondents (76%) expressed their dissatisfaction with Tangibles (Table 3). Most respondents (86%) were slightly disloyal towards Anggrek Specialist Polyclinic and there were only a few who were loyal (Table 4).

In overall, the correlation between patient satisfaction and loyalty showed that a large proportion of unsatisfied patients tended to be slightly disloyal. The correlation between satisfaction and loyalty was measured from $p\text{-value}=0.001$ ($p<0.05$), and correlation coefficient $r=0.439$ (Table 5). The satisfaction dimension with significant correlation to loyalty was Responsiveness with $p=0.039$ ($p<0.05$) and $r=0.292$ (weak correlation), while other satisfaction dimensions showed insignificant correlation to loyalty (Table 6).

Discussion

Patient satisfaction is important and widely used as an indicator of health care services quality.⁶ Satisfaction is the comparison of patient's expectation and perceived experience of health care services. Most patients were unsatisfied and only a few patients were satisfied with the health care services they received. This could occur due to the overly high expectations or perceived experience that failed to fulfill their expectations. Furthermore, from the education perspective, high education can also affect their expectations and perceptions towards the health care service they received. Bahrampour and Zolala⁷ showed that there is an inverse correlation between education background and level of satisfaction, which means a higher level of satisfaction is found more among respondents with lower levels of education. Improvement of service quality is definitely required to achieve a high level of patient satisfaction. Asian countries pay their health professional less than other countries, possibly reducing their motivation in providing better services and hence patient's level of satisfaction.⁸

The dimensions in which patients showed the highest level of satisfaction were Empathy and Assurance. This showed that patients were satisfied with the empathy shown by doctors and nurses in the form of care and individual attention towards them. In addition, patients also expressed their satisfaction over Assurance which included the doctor's

Table 6 Correlation between Satisfaction and Loyalty Based on Dimension of Service Quality

| Dimension | Loyalty | | Slightly Disloyal | | Disloyal | | r | P |
|------------------|---------|-----|-------------------|-----|----------|-----|-------|-------|
| | (f) | (%) | (f) | (%) | (f) | (%) | | |
| Tangibles | | | | | | | | |
| Highly Satisfied | 1 | 50 | 1 | 50 | 0 | 0 | 0.064 | 0.657 |
| Satisfied | 1 | 10 | 9 | 90 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Dissatisfied | 5 | 13 | 33 | 87 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Reliability | | | | | | | | |
| Highly Satisfied | 1 | 100 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.246 | 0.085 |
| Satisfied | 3 | 20 | 12 | 80 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Dissatisfied | 3 | 9 | 31 | 91 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Responsiveness | | | | | | | | |
| Highly Satisfied | 2 | 50 | 2 | 50 | 0 | 0 | 0.292 | 0.039 |
| Satisfied | 4 | 16 | 21 | 84 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Dissatisfied | 1 | 5 | 20 | 95 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Assurance | | | | | | | | |
| Highly Satisfied | 3 | 27 | 8 | 73 | 0 | 0 | 0.152 | 0.292 |
| Satisfied | 2 | 10 | 18 | 90 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Dissatisfied | 2 | 10 | 17 | 90 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Empathy | | | | | | | | |
| Highly Satisfied | 1 | 25 | 3 | 75 | 0 | 0 | 0.019 | 0.895 |
| Satisfied | 4 | 12 | 29 | 88 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Dissatisfied | 2 | 15 | 11 | 85 | 0 | 0 | | |

knowledge, attitude, and ability to be trusted and believed by patients.

The dimension with the poorest level of satisfaction was Tangibles. This meant that the patients were unsatisfied by the facilities, equipment, and presentation of health care workers. This was due to the large number of patients complaining about the very poor toilet hygiene. Moreover, the patients faced difficulties in finding free parking lots due to the very limited parking area. The considerable number of patients at Dr. Hasan Sadikin General Hospital comes from all corners of West Java as it is the provincial referral hospital. Another factor would be the vehicles of the hospital staff that occupied too much parking space.

Another dimension with poor level of satisfaction was Reliability. One of the indicators was the specialist's punctuality in managing the patients. The low level of satisfaction in this area could be due to the fact that the specialists in the polyclinic are also the teaching staff in charge of residents

and co-assistants. Furthermore, some of them have structural positions in the hospital management, restricting them from being punctual due to the teaching obligations or even citosurgeries. This problem forced the patients to unnecessarily wait for the doctors.

According to the study by Anbori et al.⁹, Empathy and Assurance dimensions, which represent the quality of interpersonal communication, have a strong influence on the patient's motivation to return to the same health care facility. The manager of the health care facility should pay close attention to these dimensions to improve the service quality beside the physical facilities, so that patient's loyalty towards the health care service can be increased.

The analysis of the correlation between patient satisfaction and loyalty in Anggrek Specialist Polyclinic revealed that most unsatisfied patients were slightly disloyal. In general, the correlation was significant with $p=0.001$ ($p<0.05$) and a moderate positive

correlation ($r=0.439$) according to Guilford criteria.

This finding is supported by a study by Mortazavi et al.¹⁰, which shows that satisfied patients are more likely to be loyal towards the health care service. Another study in the field of finance also produced similar results, Oladele¹¹ reveals that there is a correlation between customer's satisfaction and loyalty. In addition, Fandy Tjiptono and Gregorius Chandra² mention that patient satisfaction correlates positively with loyalty; therefore, it can potentially increase future income. Moreover, customer's loyalty is crucial for health care service providers to be able to survive and compete with others because attracting new customers is far more difficult than preserving old customers.¹

The correlation between the two variables was positive, meaning that the higher the satisfaction, the higher the patient's loyalty was. However, the strength of correlation was only moderate. This was also indicated by the relatively large number of highly satisfied patients who were still slightly disloyal. Patient satisfaction does not guarantee loyalty, but it encourages loyalty. In some industries, almost 70% customers who have switched to another firm are actually customers who are satisfied by the previous service they received. They switch because of better prices and interesting promotions.¹²

Out of the five service quality dimensions, there was only one with a significant correlation to loyalty, i.e. Responsiveness, with $p=0.039$ and $r=0.292$ showing a weak positive correlation.

In conclusion, there is a significant, positive correlation between patient satisfaction and loyalty in Anggrek Specialist Polyclinic at Dr. Hasan Sadikin General Hospital Bandung. This study sought to provide some evaluative materials for health care providers so as to keep improving their service quality, thereby increasing patient's satisfaction and loyalty.

The limitations of the study are environmental factors which could affect the patient's perception of service quality, and hence patient's loyalty, such as the distance between the patient's home and hospital, and the patient's health insurance that requires him/her to seek treatment at certain hospitals only, have not been measured.

The author recommends further studies to add to this study and has some expectations for Anggrek Specialist Polyclinic to keep improving its service quality in order to

increase patient satisfaction and loyalty, thereby maintaining its competence against other health care service providers.

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