11. Future scope of Study

In other words, it can be argued that health care services are particularly complex in their characteristics, are heterogeneous in their range of medical specialisations and associated services, and ambiguous in the sense that the average customer has no technical knowledge to understand his or her particular needs or the services available to satisfy them. Thus, accepting this complexity, heterogeneity and ambiguity, quality should not only be assessed from the customer’s point of view, but also from that of the providers. An approach based on both customers and providers offers a much more complete picture of health care quality than simply measuring customer satisfaction.

Hospitals that have customer-specific capabilities benefit from favorable cost and revenue advantages. Hospitals can train the personnel towards better orienting them to customer and market needs, such that ‘new products more closely meet customer desires’ and this would eventually lead to greater sales volume and revenue for the organizations. A patient/consumer would be willing to pay higher prices if Multi Specialty Hospital is able to convince the patient/consumer of why the provided service is of the desired quality and is the optimal solution to the patient/consumer’s needs. However, this can be done only when the Multi Specialty Hospital itself is sure of what the patient/consumer wants, which is dependent on effective market orientation that engages in needs assessment and patient/consumer focus.

Apart from understanding patient satisfaction dimensions, it is beneficial for managers to understand staff perceptions regarding patient expectations and perceptions. The study should involved staff from different functional areas (e.x. nursing, management and radiology) and found that differences in staff understanding patient priorities and perceptions did indeed emerge. Apart from intra-organizational learning, such an analysis can also lead to
recognizing and rewarding high levels of services with positive effects on staff morale and esteem

Hospital strategists must become more aware of the strategic drift that the industry has taken and realize that health care delivery systems are highly centered on the patient/consumer interactions. The importance of the human element in health care delivery is both a great opportunity (if employees are trained and motivated to provide consistently high-quality service) and a great threat and competitive weakness (if employees are not customer-oriented). Organizations need to bring managers close to the customers by serving periodically in backrooms where they can have direct contact with customers and employees to check for weaknesses and points to be changed.

11.1 The proposed conceptual framework

A conceptual framework for healthcare service quality, based on the literature review and discussions presented in previous sections is shown in Figure. The framework conceptualizes service quality on various primary and secondary dimensions, namely, infrastructure, personnel quality, trustworthiness of the hospital, administrative procedures, process of clinical care, social responsibility, hospital image and safety indicators. The dimensions have been already explained in previous section. The proposed instrument for measuring these dimensions is provided. Items have been modified largely in order to suit the context of healthcare services. One of the criticisms on SERVQUAL was it focused only on the functional aspects of service and not on technical aspects. Therefore, the dimension, “process of clinical care” could be adapted from Duggirala et al. (2008). To make the instrument more comprehensive, two dimensions, namely, hospital image and trustworthiness of the hospital, have been added. Many of the items could be added with respect to these dimensions. Appendix gives the list of items, which could be adapted and modified from SERVQUAL, Duggirala et al. (2008), MBNQA (2007) and JCI (2007) and those items which are proposed in the present study.
Future scope of Study

The instrument for measuring patients’ perceptions could be supplemented with another instrument with same dimensions but the items modified to capture attendants’ perceptions. In the case of attendants, the items can be rephrased so as to obtain attendant’s perception of service provided to the patient. For example, the first item in “social responsibility” would appear as “Fair medical treatment provided to the patient by the hospital” in the instrument developed for capturing attendants’ perceptions, as opposed to “Fair medical treatment provided to you by the hospital” in the instrument meant for patients’ perspective.

The issue of what and how to provide service that best attracts and retains customers has been gaining centrality of late. The current study addresses this issue by uncovering the critical determinants of healthcare service quality. The present study also adopts relevant aspects of MBNQA (2007) and JCI (2007) frameworks towards measuring service quality dimensions from patients’ and attendants’ perspective. Hence, the framework developed is comprehensive, and could be adopted by hospitals in measuring and monitoring the service quality perceptions of the service receivers.

The instruments developed can be used by hospital administrators and managers of healthcare institutions to measure the level of service delivered by them. This study would also help the service providers to identify the similarities and differences in the preferences of these two customer groups, namely, patients and attendants, in order to make strategic decisions. In turn they could decide where to make trade-offs while allocating resources so as to meet the needs of diverse customer groups. We propose a seven-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 indicating “very low” level of service to 7 indicating “very high” level of service) to measure the perceptions of services offered. A hospital scoring less than “4” in a dimension indicates that customers perceive low level of quality and has to improve its services with respect to that dimension. Further, a hospital which has high scores in patients’ perceptions may score low with respect to attendants’ perceptions. This means that it has to design new strategies to take care of the attendants’ needs. Thus, a hospital can compare its performance in terms of the service quality dimensions and its customers’ satisfaction with the benchmarks set by the best in class among similar hospitals. A hospital can also monitor its performance over time. Further, a hospital can do functional benchmarking by using the service quality dimensions across its departments.
Future scope of Study

The goal of any business is to satisfy customers’ needs, which in turn would result in customer satisfaction. A regression analysis of Service Quality as the dependent variable and Market Orientation as independent variables would aid in understanding those dimensions which impact the customer satisfaction the most.

This could be done with respect to both patient and attendant perspectives. This would enable the service providers to prioritize the dimensions on which they have to focus first. The study can also be extended by obtaining the importance attached to each dimensions by the respondents. Thereafter, a performance-importance analysis proposed could be undertaken. This analysis would reveal to the practitioners how to allocate or economize resources and where it is essential to focus for quality improvement.

A conceptual research framework has been proposed to measure service quality from the perspectives of patients as well as attendants. Two instruments, one each for patients and attendants, have been developed for this purpose. Any hospital embarking on a journey towards total quality management should understand its customers as “Quality” is defined as satisfying customer needs. For hospitals, understanding the customers’ needs marks the starting point of their journey. These hospitals could use the service quality perceptions as “voice of customers”, which would in turn serve to construct “house of quality” from organizational perspective. As discussed in the literature review, hospitals have to be aware of their customer (patient) requirements so as to satisfy them. The satisfied customers spread their word mouth and in turn persuade their family and friends to avail of services from a particular hospital. These recommendations play a significant role in patient purchase decision, as mostly patients depend on their attendants for availing healthcare services. The satisfied patients also remain loyal and are willing to pay more for enhanced services. In this regard, a path analysis of Service Quality ! Customer Satisfaction! Behavioural Intentions could be done.
11.2 Conceptual Diagram (Hypothetical Model)