CHAPTER - 5
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

One of the key determinants of human development is the ability to live long and healthy life. It is the availability of Health Care Services at an accessible distance, with effective and complete utilization of the Health Care Services which plays a significant role as the prominent determinant in achieving the nation’s health. The increasing emphasis on expanding the private sector is developed upon the desire to maintain low-cost public healthcare for the poor, and to enable the private marketing of services for others. In order to understand the needs and satisfaction of consumers of healthcare services a study was undertaken by the researcher.

The study on service quality and customer satisfaction is based on primary data which are collected from indoor and outdoor patients of private hospitals from eight cities of Gujarat i.e. Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Rajkot, Junagadh, Anand, Himmatnagar, Vishnagar and Surat. Various patients from various disciplines i.e. general medicine, pediatrics, general surgery, gynecology and orthopedics etc. were surveyed with the help of a structured questionnaire.

5.2 Major findings of the study:

A total of 811 respondents was selected for the study. The samples were taken from Multi specialty hospitals, private and trust run hospitals from selected areas. All respondents were asked to fill the closed end questionnaire. The SERVQUAL Model developed by Parshuraman was applied to measure the customer satisfaction and service quality. Various statistical tests / techniques were applied for the study such as Univariate Analysis, Cross-tabulation with Chi-Square test, Paired t-test, Kolmogorov Smirnov Test, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), Discriminant Analysis etc. The major findings of the study are given below:

5.2.1. Demographic profile of respondents

- Respondents were selected from four zones viz. North, South, West and Central zone of Gujarat state. Out of total the number of respondents, 12.70
per cent was from Junagadh, Surat and Visnagar whereas 12.33 per cent was from Anand, Himatnagar, Rajkot and Vadodara respectively. 12.58 per cent of respondents was from Ahmedabad. Thus it can be observed that there was an equal proportion of respondents selected from all the cities across the state.

- As far as gender proportion is concerned, it was 68.6 per cent male and 31.4 per cent female. Thus the gender ratio was about 70:30. Among the selected 811 respondents, 12.7 per cent female was from Junagadh, Surat and Visnagar whereas 12.3 per cent female was from Anand, Himatnagar, Rajkot and Vadodara respectively. 12.6 per cent of female respondents was from Ahmedabad.

- From the selected respondents, 71.76 per cent was married and 28.24 per cent was unmarried respondents.

- During the data collection, the respondents were asked for their educational qualification. In the study 481 (59.32 per cent) were graduates, 215 (26.51 per cent) were post graduates, 62 (7.64 per cent) were higher secondary passed, and 13 (1.60 per cent) had professional degree whereas 36 (4.44 per cent) had other qualifications like Diploma, Doctorate, etc. It can be concluded that almost all the selected respondents were literate. Only 4(0.49 per cent) were illiterate.

- A majority of the respondents, 179 (22.07 per cent) were employees of private firm / company, 158 (19.48 per cent) were farmers, 122 (15.04 per cent) were businessmen, 85 (10.48 per cent) were government servants, 154 (18.99 per cent) female respondents were housewives, 44 (5.43 per cent) were self employed (i.e. running tuition classes, technician, labour, etc), 53 (6.54 per cent) were unemployed and the remaining 16 (1.97 per cent) were either retired, students or having other occupation.

- Among the selected respondents majority (47 per cent) was in the age group of 21-30. In most of the cases when patients were not in a position to answer, attendants were asked for responses.
5.2.2 Decision makers for hospital selection and sources of information

Under the research study respondents were asked about decision makers of hospital selection.

- It was found that out of 811 respondents, 268 (33.05 per cent) said that selection of hospital was their self decision, 343 (42.29 per cent) said the decision was taken by their family members, 121 (14.92 per cent) said they took joint decision with other family members whereas 79 (9.74 per cent) said their spouse took this type of decision when it was required.

- When they were asked about the source of information on hospital, 49 per cent cited family as the source, 23.51 per cent by friends, 13 per cent from advertisement and only 8 per cent got information from their family doctors. The literature review also revealed that word of mouth is still the dominating source of information about the hospitals. The research also reveals the same i.e. friends and family are the dominating source of information for the respondents.

- When the respondents were asked about their visit to the hospital, out of the total, 531 (65.53 per cent) said it was their first visit to the hospital whereas 280 (34.56 per cent) said it was not their first visit to the hospital.

5.2.3. Factors affecting selection of private hospital

In this study discriminant analysis was performed to identify the discriminant function which is helpful in differentiating the respondents as satisfied or dissatisfied with respect to the variables related to hospitals.

- On the basis of the discriminant function it was easy to discriminate the respondents.

\[ Y \ (\text{Respondent Preference}) = -1.425 + 1.702 \times (\text{Hospital facilities}) - 1.804 \times (\text{qualification of doctors}) + 0.945 \times (\text{Cleanliness of hospital}) + 0.559 \times (\text{Experience of doctors}) - 0.495 \times (\text{Reputation of hospital}) \]
If the function value (Y) was nearer to -0.566 then the respondents were classified as dissatisfied. While, if the function value was nearer to 0.227 then the respondents were classified as satisfied.

With the help of discriminant function, the factors affecting hospital selection were identified and among the 22 criteria, looking at criteria wise percentages of preferences, it is found that majority (96.1 per cent) of the total respondents preferred hospitals with well qualified doctors whereas 94.6 per cent considered the reputation of the hospital and 93.6 per cent considered the experience of the doctors in the hospital. Other factors which were affecting the selection of hospital were easy payment system, location, good ambience, cleanliness, providing accurate and true information regarding the status of patient, proper guidance, diagnosis and fast facilities. Some respondents preferred to take advice to decide in the form of the suggestions given by family doctors, friends, relatives or neighbors.

5.2.4. Preferences for service quality of selected private hospitals

Marketing management has given the utmost importance to need satisfaction and service quality determines satisfaction. Therefore to identify patients’ perceptive regarding preference of services required from a hospital were asked to give weightage to various services out of 100 points.

- As far as priority of the services were concerned, 36.87 per cent gave first priority to best treatment, 30.5 per cent had clean & hygienic place as a priority whereas 31.5 per cent wanted perfect diagnosis. The priority of the respondents regarding patient care was found associated with their demographic variables. Except gender, researcher found significant association between the demographic variables and priority of health care from the hospital.

- It was found that majority of the respondents with monthly income up to Rs. 30000 selected trust run and other private hospitals, whereas respondents having monthly income of more than Rs.50000 selected multispecialty hospitals. There was a significant difference in selection of hospitals by people belonging to different income level.
• Patients who had taken treatment from private and trust run hospitals were not very satisfied with services and treatments they got as compared to multi specialty hospitals.

5.2.5. Service Quality and patients’ satisfaction

Under the research study expectations and perceptions of the respondents towards private hospital were studied. Using factor analysis, 23 statements regarding private hospitals were divided in five groups viz., Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy.

• One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov non-parametric test was applied to check the fitting of Gaussian distribution on collected data. All p-values were found to be less than 0.01. Hence by using non-parametric test “Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test”, comparison of expectation and perception regarding all the five factors (mentioned above) of respondents was performed. The significant difference in expectation and perception of respondents was found in reliability, assurance and empathy and hence it was also found that there was a significant difference in expectation and perception of the selected respondents regarding private hospitals.

• When expectations and perceptions of all respondents were compared, the study found that on an average all respondents had more expectations from the private hospitals as compared to perceptions. To check the significance of difference among the four zones, Analysis of Variance test was applied. The results showed that there was significant difference in the ratio of Expectation to Perception among respondents from the selected four zones. Thus it can be concluded that none of the private hospitals fulfilled all the expectations of the respondents.

• SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman and Zeithimal(1985), was applied here to find the relative importance given by respondents to service quality parameters and it was found that empathy (24.3 per cent) was given the highest importance by respondents, followed by assurance dimension (21.1 per cent), responsiveness (18.7 per cent) and lowest importance was given to tangibility dimension (17.4 per cent)
• As an extension of analysis, each service quality dimension was separately compiled and analyzed to compare the average gap score accorded to them by the study group. The weighted and unweighted dimensions of service quality revealed that respondents were consistently more satisfied with Empathy dimension (Average unweighted score 0.33 and Average weighted score 8.16). So it can be said that hospitals understand patients’ specific needs and also make all information available clearly. Dimension of Assurance (Average Unweighted score of 0.23 & Average Weighted Score of 5.02) was ranked second and so it can be concluded that hospital’s staff are courteous and polite and always try to instil confidence in patients. The hospital staff make the patients feel safe and confident. While Responsiveness (Average Unweighted Score of 0.03 & Average Weighted Score of 0.60) was ranked third as a dimension of service quality. It can be said that respondents were satisfied with doctors’ helping approach and knowledge of staff and making exact and reliable information available.

• Reliability (Average Unweighted Score of -0.04 & Average Weighted Score of -0.90) and tangibility (Average Unweighted Score of -0.016 & Average Weighted Score of -0.28) recorded negative score which means that the perceptions of the study group fall short of the expectations of the respondents over these two dimensions. The tangibility may include modern looking equipment, visually appealing physical facilities, well dressed staff and location of a hospital. Reliability include maintaining error free records, hospitals giving timely services without delay and hospital staff showing interest in solving patients problems. It was found that the respondents’ expectation were not fully satisfied /met in case of visually appealing physical facilities, location of hospitals and well dressed staff.

• It can be concluded that there is a significant difference in the expectation of respondents with different education qualification.

• Under SERVQUAL analysis each service quality dimension mean score was compared and analyzed. Patients had high expectations of courteous behavior
front line staff. Apart from this patients demanded for dissemination of exact and reliable information because a common man may not be fully aware of medical science and developments.

- Three services from the Empathy dimension of service quality showed lowest expectation like convenient operating hours (mean score 4.130703), nurses giving individual attention (mean score 4.224414) and understanding the patients’ specific needs (mean score 4.276202).

- Respondents were asked to give their perception on various dimensions of service quality and it was found that their perception was lowest on factors such as sufficient number of operation theaters, physical facilities and readiness of staff to solve patients’ problem. These are the areas that need to be addressed by management and upgraded urgently.

- Through SERVQUAL model quality gaps were identified from selected private hospitals. Major gaps were found in factors such as convenient operating hours (-0.61899), understanding patients’ specific needs (-0.44883), attitude of front line staff (-0.4402), dissemination of exact and reliable information from time to time (-0.42047) and individual attention from nurses (-0.40691). These are the areas where expectations exceed perception. These factors need improvements.

- It was found that the respondents of lower income and middle income groups selected either trust run hospital or private hospitals. The research study also revealed that the respondents with higher income were more satisfied with the hospital services.

- The study revealed that 86.7 per cent of respondents of North Zone were more satisfied followed by West zone (77.3 per cent), Central zone (74.8 per cent) and lowest satisfaction was found in South zone (73.9 per cent).

- Out of the 811 respondents 531 (65.5 per cent) came for the first time to the hospital, out of them 373 (64.4 per cent) were satisfied and remaining 206 (35.6 per cent) were dissatisfied. Whereas 280 respondents said that they had been to the same hospital for treatment earlier also and among them 206 (35.6 per cent) were satisfied and 74 (31.9 per cent) were not satisfied.
5.2.6 Patient loyalty

Due to increase in competition in the healthcare sector, customer retention has become a challenge for service providers. Therefore it was important to find out the loyalty of patients towards hospitals and the findings are presented as under:

- Out of the 811 respondents, 494 (60.91 per cent) of respondents had showed willingness to come back to the present hospital, if needed whereas 75(9.25 per cent) were neutral and the remaining 30 per cent respondents were not willing to come back to the same hospital in future. The researcher has applied chi square test to find the association between the willingness to come back again with gender. It was found that there was no significant difference between the willingness of the respondents and gender. Hence it can be said that male and female had the same perception.

- Out of the 811 respondents, from the North zone 18 (8.86 per cent) were not willing to come back to same hospital while 12 (5.92 per cent) were neutral, 173 (85.22 per cent) were willing to come back to same hospital. From the South zone 36 (17.74 per cent) were not willing to come back to same hospital while 21 (10.34 per cent) were neutral, 146 (71.92 per cent) were willing to come back to the same hospital. From the West zone 49 (24.14 per cent) were not willing to come back to the same hospital while 35 (17.24 per cent) were neutral, 119 (58.62 per cent) were willing to come back to the same hospital. From Central zone 31 (15.35 per cent) were not willing to come back to the same hospital while 7 (3.46) were neutral, 164 (74.23 per cent) were willing to come back to the same hospital. Thus it can be said that patients from North zone more willing to come again to the same hospital.

- It was also found that there was no significant difference between the perception of both the respondents, male and female, for switching over to another hospital.

- The study revealed that the respondents from the South and Central zones were more willing to switch over to other hospitals as compared to those from the West and North zones. There was a significant association between their
place (zone) and perception of respondents regarding switching over to other hospital

- Out of the total number of respondents 66.96 per cent of respondents were willing to recommend the present hospital to others whereas 21.45 per cent were not willing, whereas 11.59 per cent of respondents didn’t respond to this question.

- Respondents from the West and North zones were more willing to recommend the present hospital to others as compared to the South and Central zones. It was also found that significant association was seen between the place of respondents and their willingness to recommend the present hospital.

- Pearson correlation was applied to check the effect of patients’ satisfaction on customer loyalty. It was found that there is an influence of customer satisfaction on patient loyalty. The satisfied customers are more likely to come back again to the same hospital in future if needed.

5.3. Recommendation to improve service quality of private hospitals:

Despite the increased level of competition among the private hospitals, certain areas need improvements. Patients’ expectations are increasing because of increased access to information, modernization and use of information technology. Service quality is an important determinant of success and survival. The level of education among the people has also increased as a result of which expectations have increased from healthcare service providers. There are certain areas where private healthcare service providers should improve and formulate strategies accordingly.

5.3.1 Recommendation for hospital management:

- Health care service providers should disseminate correct information from time to time as more quality information leads to patient awareness and satisfaction.

- The hospitals should have convenient operating hours and nurses should give individual attention to patients. Especially this problem is found in private and trust run hospitals.
• The private hospital staff should be more proficient and well dressed. Besides they should be able to answer the queries of patients and relatives.

• In the era of cutthroat competition, private hospitals should have visually appealing physical facilities and modern looking machines and equipments. High degree of sophistication is demanded from healthcare service providers.

• Understanding patients needs and providing expected services are essential for which hospital administrators should focus on different market segments, in order to improve service quality which is an important determinant of overall patient satisfaction.

• Staff should be more cooperative with patients and relatives because when a patient comes to hospital he may be stressed, in pain and mentally disturbed. So they should be handled politely and there should be courteous behavior with relatives.

• It is observed and revealed during discussion with patients that experienced doctors are not available all the time. The visits of doctors to multispecialty hospitals are fixed on specific day and time. Therefore, experienced doctors should be made available throughout the day by hospital authorities.

• Management of private hospitals should look after the basic requirements of the patients and their relatives like neat and clean visitors’ waiting room, proper seating arrangement, availability of basic need (food, snacks, tea/coffee, proper guidance regarding location of pharmacy store, laboratory, reporting, etc.).

• Nowadays when the entire healthcare sector is moving towards computerization it is essential that hospitals maintain error free records.

• When hospitals are set up in the outskirt of cities, patients in emergency may not avail/get treatment. Hospital should be easily reachable and sign board / direction should be put at proper places to guide the people.

• Hospital is such a place where cleanliness and hygiene are highly demanded in hospital area including wards, OPD and other areas where they are of prime importance in the hospital.
• Health care service providers should increase budgets on advertisements. The major sources of information for patients are still positive word of mouth. There is a need to advertise different healthcare services by targeting various segments of the society.

• Technology developments are obvious in today’s world, front line staff should be periodically given training regarding technology use, hospital etiquettes etc.

• Hospitals of South and Central zones should concentrate more on quality service delivery; they need to focus more on patients’ satisfaction.

• The access to information technology has increased the expectations of every patient. Hospitals should also target the middle level and lower middle level customers to make them feel satisfied with services. Private hospitals and trust run hospitals should make marketing plan by focusing on these middle income group and lower middle income group expectation.

During the interview some of the information was provided by patients. Based on that it can be consolidated that multispecialty hospitals should change in payment criterion. Without advance payment they do not start treatment. Management should seriously look into this matter and make some relaxed rule so that due to the delay in payment no one suffers from lack of timely treatment. Another burning problem with multispecialty hospitals is the cost of health care facilities. This cost is beyond the limits of middle / lower class people. To expand the market, multi specialty hospitals should design treatment packages that are economic / affordable to middle income groups. There is also the controversy in the cost of treatment and services for “medical insured” and “non medical insured” persons.

The results provide an important message to management, to ensure reliable medical services, cleanliness and pleasant proficient medical staff.
Recommendation to North Zone Hospitals:

- Marketing strategies should be formulated by keeping in mind the family that plays an important role in hospital selection, along with the patients’ themselves. This can be kept in mind while designing communication and promotion strategies.
- In the era of mass communication, hospital management should increase the advertising budget. Very few hospitals in North Gujarat advertise their services to make people aware of it.
- In the North zone qualification and experience of doctors emerged as a very important criteria in the selection of private hospitals by patients. The hospital management should make future marketing plans by keeping in mind these important criteria.
- Private hospitals should maintain the cleanliness of hospital area, canteen area, waiting room and the different wards.

Recommendation to South Zone Hospitals:

- For the selection of hospitals, customers give preference to doctors’ qualification and experience and so to increase the number of patients visit private hospitals should take these features more seriously.
- In the case of South zone, hospital service delivery should be improved to improve loyalty of patients as it was lowest in this zone.
- The amount being spent on advertising by private hospitals should be increased in the south zone.
- The patients of this zone are not very much satisfied with the services being provided by hospitals and so these hospitals should focus more on customer satisfaction.

Recommendation to West Zone Hospitals:

- West zone hospitals should put more efforts on targeting family as important decision makers along with the patient himself/ herself.
- Awareness among family physician regarding private hospitals should be increased to get more patients recommended to this zone hospitals.
• Reputation of hospitals, qualification and experience of doctors should be given prime importance by administrators to attract more patients to private hospitals.

**Recommendation to Central Zone Hospitals:**

• Quality treatment, perfect diagnosis are the highly demanded features in this zone, therefore the hospital management should focus on these features.
• Advertising and family physicians’ recommendation to private hospital should be increased for acquiring more patients.
• Private hospitals of Central zone should put their efforts more on positive word of mouth for selection of hospitals as word of mouth is more powerful tool of communication against other available mass communication means.

**5.4 Conclusion:**

Health care is undergoing fundamental changes. The current health care environment changes on a daily basis. New diagnostic and therapeutic techniques and technologies, information technology and a new generation of consumers, provide a proactive consumer culture. The influence of rising costs of health care and consumerism has resulted in significant changes in health care delivery. The expectations of quality care, efficiency, responsive service, ready access, fairness, and morale provider are a reality in all hospitals. High performance is essential in every healthcare process. The effective utilization of its resources is vital for every organization, whether it is public or private, and profit making or otherwise. Hospitals are no exception. In fact Health Care Institutions need to pay even more attention to good management because of the scarcity of resources. Generally health care institutions are short of resources.

Satisfaction of customer is an invaluable asset for the modern organization, providing unmatched competitive edge. It helps in building long-term relationship as well as brand equity. To improve patient satisfaction, healthcare providers must focus on quality improvement strategies. Service quality can be defined as the difference between customers’ expectation of service performance prior to the service encounter
and their perceptions of services received. When perceptions exceed expectations it leads to positive service quality gap i.e. patient satisfaction.

In case of health care services still word of mouth i.e. information regarding hospitals and services from family play an important role. There was significant influence of education, income and area (zone) of the respondents on patients’ loyalty. The recommendation to other people was also influenced by education, income and area of the respondents.

Overall satisfaction level was seen in selected respondents regarding the hospital services especially in case of Empathy, Assurance and Responsiveness dimensions of service quality. Respondents from multispecialty hospital were more satisfied as compared to trust run and private hospitals. Respondents with lower income group and higher education were more dissatisfied as compared to others. The dissatisfaction level was seen more in South and Central zones as compared to West and North zones. The expectations of selected respondents were higher than their perceptions for selected private hospitals.

5.5. Future scope of Research

Health care facilities cannot be strengthened only through physical infrastructure and latest machines and equipments. It requires treatment in compliance with the set standards for both tangible and intangible deliverables. The researcher has tried to provide an overview of current scenario as far as private hospitals in Gujarat are concerned. There is a lot of scope of research in the same field.

- A comparison of private and public hospitals can be carried out to find service quality perception of people.
- A study on influence of medical insurance on hospital selection, preferred medical insurance schemes and peoples’ spending on medical insurance can also be carried out.
- There can be research only on multi specialty hospitals or corporate hospitals and customers’ perception on services being offered by them and their marketing strategies.
• The survey conducted was based on non-probabilistic sampling method, the respondents is feared to have answered hastily. Some of respondents may not be interested in answering certain questions as questionnaire was long.
• As a research scholar this study was a learning experience. Having less experience as a researcher can be one of the limitations.