

ABSTRACT

Bypass phenomenon in Sri Lankan health system has been identified as an inherited problem. Several studies have been carried out by different authors to explore the magnitude and the consequences of this phenomenon. The current study, 'Why Patients Prefer Eye Hospital-Colombo for Cataract Surgery over Peripheral Eye Centers' is also focused on the bypass phenomenon in relation to the eye care services. Cataract-related low vision and blindness will contribute to a significant health challenge in the future as Sri Lanka is in the face of a demographic transition where the elderly population continues to grow. Maximum and effective utilization of existing health facilities as a developing country will be very crucial in the event of facing the above challenge.

This study was carried out to identify the reasons from the patients' point of view for the selection of Eye hospital - Colombo for cataract surgery. The objectives of this study were to find out the present status in relation to the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of these patients and the factors behind their preference.

The study design was a descriptive cross sectional survey. The main study was carried out at the Eye hospital- Colombo. The study consisted of two components of which the first represented all patients undergoing cataract surgery at the Eye hospital- Colombo during the period of study and the second included all other Peripheral Eye Units in the state sector as study populations. With the assumption that 50% of patients by-passed their closest eye unit, sample size was calculated for component one. All 406 patients who admitted for cataract surgery during this period were enrolled according to non probable convenient sampling method for the study except those who were unable to fulfill the inclusion criteria.

Interviewer-administered questionnaire and check list were the study instruments. Data was collected by the Principal Investigator and two well-trained interviewers.

The study indicated a bypassing rate of 48.2% representing the percentage of patients attended the Eye hospital for cataract surgery bypassing the closest eye units and this figure is well above the values of previous similar studies.

The highest number of patients in the above category were recorded from the Western province (61.7%) followed by Southern (20.7%) and Sabaragamuwa (06.4%) provinces which collectively represented 88.8% of the total bypassed population. The majority of patients in the bypass category was within the age range of 60 to 80 years with a female predominance and resided within the 100km distant-radius from the Eye hospital. The major proportion of bypassed patients believed that the Eye hospital – Colombo was the best center in the country for cataract surgery (51.6%). During the inquiry made to find out reasons for not attending the closest unit with facilities, majority (28.2%) denied a reason.

The average cost afforded by a patient in the bypass category for the lens and other consumables was 4500 rupees. Eighty five percent (85%) of patients used foldable type of lenses in cataract surgery. Majority of patients (68.7%) used lenses valued less than 15000 rupees.

Improvement of patients' confidence and motivation of the community to accept treatment from closest institutions are important issues in addressing the problem where implementation of a proper referral system is essential.

Key words – Cataract surgery, Bypass phenomenon