

Abstract

The general objective of the study is to compare the patient satisfaction levels with respect to maternity care between two maternity units of a government sector hospital and a private hospital in Colombo. This is a cross sectional comparative study and the two hospitals were De Soyza Maternity Hospital, Colombo 08 and Durdans Hospital, Colombo 03. The specific objectives of this study were to compare the socio-demographic characteristics of the mothers attending these two sectors and to compare the factors underlying patient satisfaction in each of these two sectors. A sample of two hundred and five post natal mothers was used for the study with 103 from the public sector and 102 from the private sector. The study instrument used was a pre tested self administered questionnaire available in Sinhala, Tamil, and English languages. The patients' satisfaction with doctors was almost the same in both sectors. However, for the other categories of staff such as nurses, attendants, and laborers there was a descending order of satisfaction in relation to Empathy, Responsiveness, Reliability, Assurance and Tangibles. Meanwhile in service quality areas, private sector showed a higher level of satisfaction. Out of them assurance and tangibles were the areas which showed a statistically significant difference between the two sectors.

The level of satisfaction and some selected socio-demographic factors showed few associations. The income level of the family, the occupation of the mother and her husband and the education level were shown to be associated with satisfaction. However the relative importance of the service quality criteria showed a remarkable difference between private and public sector. Private sector rated "reliability" as the top ranking quality, while the public sector ranked "responsiveness". Reliability was the third in the rank in the public sector while responsiveness became the second in private sector. Both public and private sectors considered empathy and tangibles as the least important areas respectively. Under the "professional outlook and attire", the patients' satisfaction in the private sector, mothers ranked nurses above doctors and further more their scores were in par with attendants.

The analysis on tangibles, however, showed important results in both sectors. The difference of the overall satisfaction related to tangibles was statistically significant between the two sectors. ($p=0.02$). There were significant differences observed between the two sectors with regard to bed facility arrangements. Supply of clean water was an important area in private sector which resulted in a significant level of satisfaction. Although foods are provided in free of charge in the public sector, the food consumption by the patients in the public sector was very low (29.1%) compared to the private sector (83.3%). This is a very practical situation where the public sector has got to address very carefully as the patient view on the quality of food was also significantly low in the public sector.

The public sector mothers were more satisfied compared to private sector regarding adequate ventilation, while private sector scored high in toilet cleanliness. Mothers view on general cleanliness was almost equal in both sectors. In general when the mothers were queried about the level of satisfaction directly at the beginning of the survey the satisfaction scores were very high in both public and private sectors (90.3% and 94.1% respectively) , while there was no statistically significant difference between the two sectors.

However later, in depth analysis using service quality criteria , yielded an overall satisfaction level which was far below what was expressed at the beginning (public-61.2% and private 76.5%)This showed a statistically significant difference between the two sectors.

With respect to this study, following recommendations were made. (1) Frequent assessments of patient satisfaction to reflect patient's views must be carried out in both sectors. (2)Public sector must be vigilant on patient satisfaction as there were number of instances where the level of satisfaction was very low compared to private sector.(3)Doctors must put more attention on their professional outlook and attire.(4)The public sector should be vigilant on the free food supply to the patients with respect to cost-effectiveness analysis.

All these features have to be carefully studied and taken up seriously by the administrators and the managements involved aiming at 'customer delight'!