

THE STUDY OF WAITING TIME FOR PATIENTS IN HEALTHCARE SYSTEM AND WAYS TO REDUCE WAIT TIME BY IMPLEMENTING TIME MANAGEMENT METHODS

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Abstract

Nowadays longer waiting time has been a matter of concern to the customers. This phenomenon is mainly affecting patients in the healthcare industries. The customers often face longer waiting time to utilize the services provided by the service providers. The following study is based on the study of waiting time and understanding the effect of waiting time on patient satisfaction. This research paper highlights and suggests the different methods to reduce the waiting time by implementing time management methods in healthcare system.

Keyword: Patients, Waiting time, Hospital, Time management methods

Introduction

Waiting time is being considered as a serious problem especially in hospitals as it is the most wearisome part of the process in the healthcare system since it acts as a barrier in the efficiency of flow of patients and also leaves the patients perturbed and dissatisfied. The waiting time of patients in the hospital is the time between which the patients get the appointment and the time at which they get the treatment. There should be implementation of such a methodology in health care organization where we can reduce the waiting time for patients and at the same time priority should be given to high risks patients.

Waiting times causes several issues among patients in many countries. The patients who have to take the treatment has to wait for several days, weeks or even several months which can affect the health of the patient and also their mental state. Patients seeking publicly funded care frequently have to wait weeks or even months for many common elective procedures such as cataract surgery, hip and knee replacement. According to a survey in 2012, mean waiting time for hip replacement were about 80 days in several countries with considerable variations, e.g. about 150 days in Spain and about 50 days in Netherlands (Siciliani et al 2014).

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Aim of this Study

This paper seeks to understand ways to reduce waiting time by implementing time management methodology.

Objectives

The objective of the paper is to identify the waiting time in healthcare sector and understand the effect of waiting time on patient satisfaction.

There are also various methods suggested to reduce the waiting time of patients by implementation of different techniques.

Significance of the problem

The delivery of treatment for patients has been a very important issue in many healthcare organizations around the globe. The longer waiting time has been constantly identified as a key barrier to care. We should adopt various strategies to better measure and manage waiting times.

Research Methodology

This paper is based on the secondary data (desk research). It involves the collation and synthesis of the existing researches. This paper seeks to highlight the concept of waiting time and various methods that can be implemented to reduce waiting time. This study serves to emphasize on some effective methods to reduce waiting time.

Literature Review

The important factor is that we can reduce the cost by decreasing the waiting time. Hall et al. (2006, p.8) has mentioned three objectives that we gain by reducing the waiting time in the healthcare industry: eliminating the ineffective activities, delivering the services on time, and reducing the waiting time for the treatment. The need to increase the no. of healthcare service operators has become a matter of current debate (Paavola, 2008).

Hall (2006) argues that reduction of the waiting time in the delivery of healthcare systems demands enhancing the effectiveness of the service process as the priority. There should also be some changes in the process of arrival of patients and the queuing process should be changed by implementing techniques such as giving priority to high-risks patients.

Waiting times are very significant to the patients' who takes the treatment from the doctor more quickly and are likely to rate the care they received as excellent or very good (Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection, 2005). A review by Trout et al. (2000) identified that apparent waiting time, was inversely related with satisfaction of patients.

A review done by Taylor and Bengner (2004), studied the factors that control the patient satisfaction in the Emergency Department. They found three 'service factors' which controls the patient satisfaction. These were the interpersonal skills and attitudes of staff, the provision of information or explanation to patients, and waiting times.

Methods To Reduce the Waiting Time:

In healthcare organization waiting time for patients is a major problem as we have discussed above. There are some general methodologies like front line scheduling, application of technology, alternative methods and prioritization which we can simply implement in healthcare organization and we can try to achieve the reduction in waiting time.

There are some methods as follows:

Prioritize patient's treatment:

Patient scheduling should be focused on high-risk patient to low-risk patient. The priority for the treatment of patients should be given according to the condition of the patients' illness so it is important for healthcare sector to reach out to find what kind of changes would be best suited for their treatment.

Consider a situation, when a patient arrives at the hospital in a critical condition, he should be first treated rather than urged to complete formalities.

Alternate methods for delivering treatment:

Healthcare systems can apply telemedicine method which may be one solution for low-risks patients. Healthcare system can also associate different healthcare entities like nearby urgent care clinics so they can provide patients with an alternative to reduce the waiting time. Now-a-days a common practice is the use of mobile vans. Some hospitals offer the facility of medical vans that ply on roads and announce a specific locality where they would be stationed on a particular day. Patients from nearby locality can visit the vans. Doctors examine them and treat them accordingly.

Common facilities are medical vans that treat patients suffering from gall bladder

stone or kidney stone by means of laparoscopy. Some companies also organize mobile camps for treatment of rural mass.

□ **Improve the front-line scheduling process:**

Healthcare systems should take supply and demand into account for scheduling high-risk and low-risk patients. Patients should be scheduled for this procedures on days and hours where number of patients are more.

□ **Make reducing the wait times a part of healthcare system:**

In peak hours healthcare system should increase the appointment counters as well as supporting staff. We can also adopt technology like online self appointment through ERP systems. They must assess their hospital work flow on regular basis.

□ **Assign documentation to other trained staff**

As the time factor is important, the doctors should focus their time totally on interacting with the patients rather than completing the time consuming documentation work. Instead hire a clinical assistant who takes care of the documentation tasks like collecting patient details, managing prescriptions and taking notes during the doctor-patient visit.

□ **Keep Patients Occupied**

The idle time tends to be longer so keep the patients occupied which will make the idle time bearable. The best solution for this problem is implementation of electronic health records (EHRs).

Conclusion

In this paper we have studied waiting time for patients in various healthcare organizations. Numerous methods have been suggested for eliminating the waiting time by the utilization of various time management techniques. Application of these techniques in the healthcare industry would be helpful for the reduction of waiting time which in turn will leave the patients satisfied. The reduction in waiting time can also reduce the cost of the organization. Implementation of modern time management systems can effectively reduce the waiting time and can affect the organization in a positive way.

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