

Interactive marketing practices in corporate hospitals

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Abstract

The basic service package of hospital involves a series of activities (Process), a patient has to pass through. The patient will interact with a variety of variables. Each variable has the capacity to influence the quality perception of the patient. 'Process' is termed as 'Interactive Marketing' in services marketing. The objective of the study is to investigate and compare the service delivery process in selected super-specialty hospitals and making suitable suggestions on the basis of statistical analysis of perceptions collected from Doctors, Nurses and Administrative Personnel. The collected data is analyzed by applying descriptive and inferential statistical techniques such as mean, standard deviation. Perceptions of respondents on service delivery process are positively opinioned in two sample hospitals. Mean and S.D. scores are in the range of 2.34 to 2.66 (Grand Mean) 0.36 to 0.61 (S.D) in APOLLO and 2.42 to 2.67 (Grand Mean) 0.36 to 0.47 (SD) in CARE respectively, on a 5 point scale indicating perceptions of the sample hospitals is agreeable. It is concluded as the respondents (Doctors, Nurses and Administrative Personnel) perceptions are agreeable to the service delivery process of two sample hospitals.

Keywords: Process; Interactive Marketing; Hospital Services; Internal Marketing

Introduction

One of the important seven components of services marketing mix is 'Process' termed as 'Interactive Marketing' in services marketing. Interactive marketing may be defined as the 'managerial process through which a series of interactions between service provider and consumer are organized to facilitate efficient participation in service production and consumption that satisfies the needs and wants of the consumers and create positive- perceived quality' Interactive marketing take place between contact employee of the service hospital and service consumers. Through internal marketing, service hospitals prepare contact employees, physically and mentally, to perform the service. Consumers are also educated and trained to participate in service production and consumption through external marketing. The actual process of service production, delivery and consumption takes place simultaneously during the interactions of contact employees and consumers. The meeting between contact employee and service consumers is called 'service encounter' Among above interacting points, there are four quality generating resources in process mix for hospital patients are directly involved in the service production systems as quality generating resource. They are active participants and take part in production. Contact persons are those employees who directly interact with patients. Any one in hospital can be a contact person irrespective of his position or job. Interaction may take place directly or face to face or indirectly over the telephone, fax, mail or internet. Contact personnel are the most crucial resource for a hospital. The other resources such as system, technology and physical resources work to support the contact person. Systems operational routines include queuing, billing and payment systems. When systems and routine are complex and complicated, patients may keep away from the service. Therefore it is necessary for hospitals to design service-oriented systems and documents to facilitate an

effective interactive process. Physical resources and equipment include all kinds of resources such as computers, documents and other tools that are used in service production system. These will influence not only the technical quality of the service but also functional quality. Therefore, every signal part in hospital has to blend with the total system in order to perform the service activity qualitatively.

Need for the Study

It is unfortunate that much discussion have not taken place on services delivery process in hospitals. Due to the changes of consumer perceptions in India, there is a need to study the service delivery process in Indian hospital industry.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective for which the research has been undertaken is

1. To study the service delivery process in hospitals.
2. To investigate and compare the service delivery process in the selected two super-specialty hospitals.
3. To elicit the perceptions of Doctors, Nurses and Administrative personnel on service delivery process of two sample hospitals and comparing.
4. To make suitable suggestion for better service delivery process.

Selection of Sample Hospitals

Two corporate hospitals namely APOLLO (Jubilee Hills) and CARE (Banjara Hills) in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh have been selected which are running on similar and almost identical facilities.

Selection of Sample Size and its Justification

The sample is taken from three categories after giving adequate representation to all classes. The three classes include doctors, nurses and administrative Personnel.

Following table showing the population and sample size of two selected super specialty hospitals

Table 1: Population and Sample size in Selected Hospitals

S. No	Respondents	APOLLO		CARE		Total	
		Population	Sample	Population	Sample	Population	Sample
1	Doctors	156	75	127	75	283	150
2	Nursing Staff	340	150	320	150	660	300
3	Administrative Personnel	45	35	40	35	85	70

Discussion and Inference

Pertaining to the questionnaire to doctors in APOLLO, out of 156 doctors, the questionnaire was distributed to 85 and only 75 response sheets were taken for final analysis. Out of 127 doctors in CARE, the questionnaire was distributed to 90 and 75 response sheets were selected for final analysis. In the case of questionnaire relating to nursing staff, in APOLLO, out of 560 nurses, 340 nurses are working on permanent basis and 220 are working on contract basis. The questionnaires were distributed to 170 nurses who are working on permanent basis and finally 150 questionnaires were selected for analysis. In the case of CARE hospital, out of 510 nurses, 320 nurses are working on permanent basis and remaining 190 are working on temporary basis. The questionnaires were distributed to 180 respondents who are working on permanent basis and 150 response sheets were taken for final analysis. The questionnaires developed for administrative personnel was distributed to 45 numbers in APOLLO, and 35 were selected as sample for final analysis. Out of 40 administrative personnel in CARE hospital, 35 persons are selected for final analysis.

Methodology for Data Analysis

The questionnaire, which was intended to diagnose the opinions of respondents (Doctors, Nurses and Administrative Personnel) on people mix in two sample hospitals, contains twenty statements in total. The count of responses is considered and for each type of response (Strongly Agree, Agree, Can't Say, Disagree and Strongly Disagree) and for each type of respondents in two hospitals, the Mean and S.D is calculated separately. Finally conclusions are derived by calculating Grand Mean and S.D.

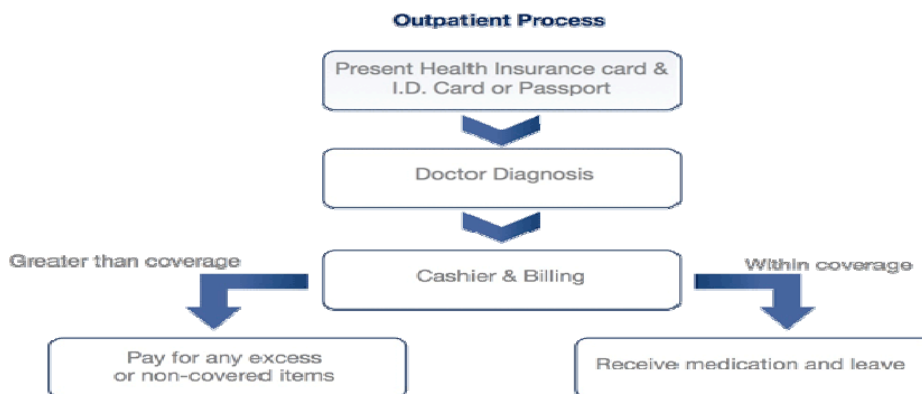
Literature Survey

'Hospital Process Orientation from an Operations Management Perspective: Development of a Measurement Tool and Practicle Testing in Three Ophthalmic Practices' by Pedro D Goncalves, Marie Louise Hagenbeek and Jan MH

Vissers ^[1] BMC Health Services Research 2013, 13:475 identified the development and practically testing of a new hospital process orientation measurement tool improves the understanding and application of process orientation in hospitals and their reliability of the measurement tool. 'Assessment of Client's Satisfaction with Health Service Deliveries at Jimma University Specialized Hospital' by Fekadu Assefa, Andulem Mosses and Yohannes Hailemichael ^[2] Ethiopian Journal of Health Sciences, July 2011, 21 (2), 101-109 identified that lack of drugs and suppliers, poor information provision, long waiting time, poor cleanliness, lack of privacy and inadequate visiting hours, were found to be the major cause of dissatisfaction. 'Improving Service Delivery in FM: Case Study of a UK Hospital Facilities Directorate' by M.Sarshar ^[3] Journal of Facilities Management, Volume: 4, Issue: 4, pp: 271-285, 2006, emphasized some of the operational deficiencies in the organization, such as health and safety management and health management. It identifies specifically how these processes can be improved. 'Modelling Variations in Hospital Service Delivery Based on Real Time Locating Information' by Nagesh Shukala, John Keast and Darek Ceglarek ^[4] Applied Mathematical Modelling, Research Online, University of Wollongong, identified variations in service delivery as a major challenge to the success of process improvement.

Hospitals Service Delivery Process

In hospitals services process starts under two broad categories, viz services for inpatients and those for outpatients. The process for these two services is a little different. The basic process however starts with reporting at the reception at the appointed time and meeting the doctor concerned for diagnosis and treatment. If the doctor says that simple medication is required, the patient can avail of the services as an outpatient. The patient needs special continuous care and needs to be admitted to the hospital and then the patient becomes an inpatient.



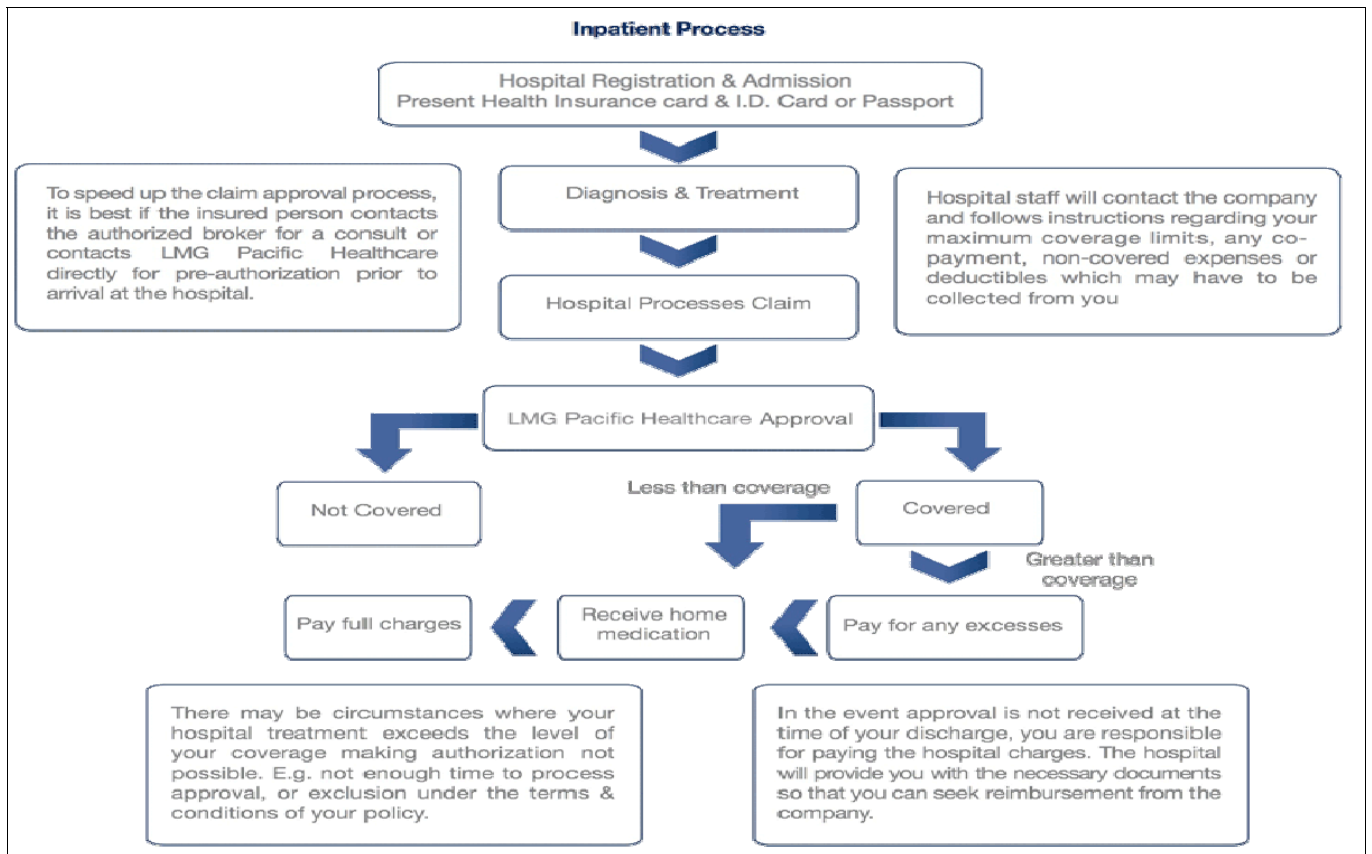


Fig 1: A Typical Outpatient and Inpatient Service Delivery Process in Hospitals

The services process in hospitals for inpatients are spread over operation theaters, intensive care units, emergency units, regular wards etc. Administrative work like registration, stores, diet for the in-patients, maintenance of the patient records, security etc. is carried on by the staff assisting the line officers. Apart from the in-house treatment, some hospitals run mobile clinics to provide patients easy access to services. Providing online consultation is also fast gaining popularity in the west, though in India, where technical awareness is comparatively low, it may take some time for the masses to welcome such innovative concepts. Corporate affairs are managed by professionals specially appointed for this purpose. Affiliated academic institutions educate and train healthcare professional and research institutions concentrate on discovering and developing new concepts.

Service Delivery Process in Apollo Hospital

Apollo hospital has paid special attention in simplifying the procedure for admission in to the hospital for treatment. It has taken all measures to extend medical treatment in single premises, which creates easy accessibility to all patients to avail the services of various specialized doctors. Keeping in view different types of patients that approach Apollo hospital, the hospital management has instituted several registration centers at different places in the state. The patients, who want to take prior permission may consult these centers and can get appointments for the consultation. Apollo encourages prior appointments to avoid unnecessary waiting time to the patients in the hospital. For the patients who come to the hospital directly without prior appointments, the Apollo management has opened four registration centers to avoid

congestion and for arranging time bound appointments with the doctors.

At the registration counters, patients' information forms are available and those who want to get treatment have to fill up the forms with all the required details as sought by the hospital. Patients' information is recorded in two files. One is given to the patient and the other file is kept in the office for official use. All documents relating to the patient's disease are kept in these files. The patients are asked to wait at the patient waiting halls till their stipulated time comes for consultation.

Apollo management has taken meticulous care in providing all required amenities in the waiting halls, where the patients feel relaxed. Patient record files are handed over to the concerned doctor's secretaries. Then the patients are called and sent to nurses' assessment rooms for general checkup of their health, like blood pressure, weight, height etc. All the findings are recorded in the patients' files. Then the patients are taken to the Assistant doctors for further consultation. Basing on the reports, the doctors diagnose the disease or sometimes if required, the patients will be sent for further diagnostic tests. In that situation, the patients may have to move to the pathology department for further investigation of their disease. In the pathology department, the clinical clerks attend to the patients and conduct the required tests and the findings are reported back within one to two hours to the patients by collecting required charges. On examining the reports, the patients get treatment from senior doctors.

In case of any complexity, which requires for the patients to stay in the hospital wards for close monitoring of the progress of health, the patients have to stay as in-patient in the hospital

as per the recommendations of the doctors. Hospital pharmacy is opened all the 24 hours for the benefit of the patients. X-ray Units, Ultra Sound, Blood Bank, ECG Unit, Apollo Health Checkup, Diabetic Center, Direct Clinic, Center for Liver Diseases, Cardiology Consultancy, Echo/ECH/TMT/Halters/PFT Labs, Microbiology Labs, Hormonology, CTS Scan Department of Urology, Aesthetic Center, Gynecology, Andrology, Lithotripsy like all these departments have been arranged in one premises at different blocks for the convenience of the patients in getting wholesome and timely treatment.

Service Delivery Process in Care Hospital

The process followed in extending medical services to the patients and visitors at Care hospital is simple, patient friendly and time saving. The out patients who want to take treatment in care hospital have to take prior permission or appointment from registration department in consultation with the doctor concerned. To avoid congestion and to save the time of patients/visitors, the care hospital has made arrangements to get appointment through e-mail, phone or in person. The outpatients, who go to the care hospital directly, have to contact department of registrations and get the serial number for the stipulated time to consult the doctor. They may wait in the waiting halls till their chance comes. For this care hospital is providing spacious waiting halls with all the facilities like comfortable seating, televisions, magazines, newspapers and clean water supply, telephone and toilet facilities to make the patients feel comfortable and homely. As and when the turn of the patient comes, he may go to the concerned doctor’s chamber for consultation. In case of any delay at the doctor’s room, the patients may have to wait a couple of minutes at the sub-waiting halls adjacent to the

doctor’s chamber. After the consultation, the patient will have to move to the department concerned as per the direction of the doctor. If the doctor recommends for any diagnosis or therapeutic examination like X-ray, ECG, physical therapy etc, the patients may have to move to diagnostic center situated in the first and second floors of the hospital. In case of treatment or for purchase of medicine, the patients may have to go to treatment centre or pharmacy situated at ground floor.

Based on the clinical examinations and the gravity of the ill health, the patients may be recommended to join as inpatient. Spacious and hygienic patient wards with all the facilities are provided in the third and fourth floors in the hospital. Patients may undergo treatment while staying in the patients’ wards for the required period of time. In case of emergency medical cases, the care hospital staff responds immediately and attends to the patients without any further delay. The patient will be shifted either to the surgery room or wards as per the medical need after providing first aid. In case of maternity patients, a special maternity ward with adjacent delivery room is provided. By observing the service delivery process in two sample hospitals it is cleared that the hospitals designed process for different categories of hospital services utilises in a simple manner. Without any confusion patients can move in the process to get their required service in the hospital. Further it is also cleared that the two hospitals designed the process by keeping the time factor, and maintaining least possible time to finish the treatment for the patients. Let us examine the perceptions of respondents. Following table exploring Mean and S.D of doctor’s perceptions on the service delivery process of sample hospitals.

Table 2: Mean and S.D of Doctor’s Perceptions on the Service Delivery Process of Sample Hospitals (N=75)

S. No	Statement	Apollo		Care	
		Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D
1	In this hospital, to get treatment the process is very lengthy and time consuming.	3.80	0.65	3.66	0.79
2	Your hospital bill settlement process is simple.	2.08	0.98	2.06	0.85
3	The process to discharge the patient is simple in this hospital.	2.26	1.24	2.4	1.31
4	The process for emergency discharge is complicated in this hospital.	2.85	1.30	3.21	1.32
5	Service counters provided in this hospital are sufficient.	1.86	0.89	2.00	0.73
6	The length of waiting time of patients in this hospital is reasonable.	2.20	0.65	2.33	0.79

Point Scale: 1-strongly agree.....5-strongly disagree

Above table reveals that the perceptions of doctors on the service delivery process of the Apollo hospital. ‘to get treatment the process is very lengthy and time consuming’ (3.80), ‘bill settlement process is simple’ (2.08), ‘process to discharge the patient is simple’ (2.26), ‘complicated process for emergency discharge’ (2.85), ‘sufficient service counters’ (1.86), length of waiting time is reasonable’ (2.20). From the above results it is noticed that the respondents are having positive opinion on service delivery process of sample

hospital. In the case of Care hospital; ‘process is very lengthy and time consuming’ (3.66), ‘bill settlement process is simple’ (2.06), ‘process to discharge the patient is simple’ (2.40), ‘complicated process for emergency discharge’ (3.21), ‘sufficient service counters’ (2.00), length of waiting time is reasonable’ (2.33). According to the above results, it can be concluded as the respondents having positive opinion on service delivery process of sample hospital.

Table 3: Mean and S.D of Nurses Perceptions on the Service Delivery Process of Sample Hospitals (N=150)

S. No	Statement	Apollo		Care	
		Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D
1	In this hospital, to get treatment the process is very lengthy and time consuming.	4.06	0.68	4.00	0.81
2	Your hospital bill settlement process is simple.	2.46	0.68	2.53	1.15
3	The process to discharge the patient is simple in this hospital.	1.88	1.20	1.86	0.62
4	The process for emergency discharge is complicated in this hospital.	3.66	1.07	3.46	0.80
5	Service counters provided in this hospital are sufficient.	1.99	1.14	2.20	0.83
6	The length of waiting time of patients in this hospital is reasonable.	1.93	0.68	2.00	0.81

Point Scale: 1-strongly agree.....5-strongly disagree

Above table reveals that the perceptions of nurses on the service delivery process of Apollo hospital. 'to get treatment the process is very lengthy and time consuming' (4.06), 'bill settlement process is simple' (2.46), 'process to discharge the patient is simple' (1.88), 'complicated process for emergency discharge' (3.66), 'sufficient service counters' (1.99), length of waiting time is reasonable' (1.93). Therefore it can be said that the respondents are having positive opinion on service delivery process of sample hospital.

In the case of Care hospital; 'process is very lengthy and time consuming' (4.00), 'bill settlement process is simple' (2.53), 'process to discharge the patient is simple' (1.86), 'complicated process for emergency discharge' (3.46), 'sufficient service counters' (2.20), length of waiting time is reasonable' (2.00). According to the above results, it can be concluded as the respondents having positive opinion on service delivery process of sample hospital.

Table 4: Mean and S.D of Administrative Personnel Perceptions on the Service Delivery Process of Sample Hospitals (N=35)

S. No	Statement	Apollo		Care	
		Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D
1	In this hospital, to get treatment the process is very lengthy and time consuming.	3.45	0.78	4.11	0.63
2	Your hospital bill settlement process is simple.	2.11	1.30	1.97	1.07
3	The process to discharge the patient is simple in this hospital.	1.62	0.80	1.71	0.75
4	The process for emergency discharge is complicated in this hospital.	2.20	1.05	2.74	1.01
5	Service counters provided in this hospital are sufficient.	2.14	1.39	2.11	0.99
6	The length of waiting time of patients in this hospital is reasonable.	2.57	0.85	1.88	0.63

Point Scale: 1-strongly agree.....5-strongly disagree

Above table reveals that the perceptions of nurses on the process mix of the Apollo hospital. 'to get treatment the process is very lengthy and time consuming' (3.45), 'bill settlement process is simple' (2.11), 'process to discharge the patient is simple' (1.62), 'complicated process for emergency discharge' (2.20), 'sufficient service counters' (2.14), 'length of waiting time is reasonable' (2.57). Therefore it can be said that the respondents are having positive opinion on service delivery process of sample hospital.

In the case of Care hospital; 'process is very lengthy and time consuming' (4.11), 'bill settlement process is simple' (1.97), 'process to discharge the patient is simple' (1.71), 'complicated process for emergency discharge' (2.74), 'sufficient service counters' (2.11), length of waiting time is reasonable' (1.88). According to the above results, it can be concluded as the respondents having positive opinion on service delivery process of sample hospital. Following are the consolidated Grand Mean and S.D values of perceptions of respondents on of s service delivery process of sample hospitals.

Table 5: Perceptions of Respondents on Service Delivery Process of Sample Hospitals (Grand Mean and S.D)

S. No	Respondents	Apollo		Care	
		Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D
1	Doctors	2.50	0.36	2.61	0.47
2	Nurses	2.66	0.61	2.67	0.36
3	Administrative Personnel	2.34	0.59	2.42	0.37

5 Point Scale: 1-strongly agree.....5-strongly disagree

Rating on Service Delivery Process of Sample Hospitals

Above table shows that the perceptions of doctors, nurses and administrative personnel on service delivery process, entire are positively opinioned in two sample hospitals. The Grand Mean and S.D. scores are in the range of 2.34 to 2.66 (Grand Mean) 0.36 to 0.61 (S.D) in APOLLO and 2.42 to 2.67 (Grand Mean) 0.36 to 0.47 (SD) in CARE respectively, on a 5 point scale indicating perceptions of the sample hospitals is agreeable. Finally it is concluded as the respondents (Doctors, Nurses and Administrative Personnel) perceptions are agreeable to the service delivery process of two sample hospitals.

**Suggestions for Better Service Delivery Process
Emphasis on Professionalism**

Everything the work, attitude to work, behavior, appearance and dress is professional. Public relations is greatly impaired if staff are indiscipline and patients and visitors find them giggling, gossiping, engaged in conversation while patients are waiting, or occupy themselves with reading newspapers, magazines or story books, leave their place of work or crowd in one place away from their place of work.

Well Informed Staff

The patients do not know what sickness they have and which specialists they need to consult. Further visitors make enquires on a wide range of subjects about doctors, specialists, their outpatient and operation days, their working hours, various doctors' specialties, what those specialties mean (e.g. cardio-thoracic surgery, gastroenterology, etc.)

Most of the enquires come to the telephone operator or directed to the receptionists or the enquiry desk. All staff should be given training and orientation and kept informed of every important aspect of the hospital work.

Code of Conduct

For the smooth functioning of the hospital, management must formulate a code of conduct for employees, and put on record their duties and obligations. These may be part of what are called employees service rules, standing orders or work rules which many hospitals in our country have.

Patient Guide

Every hospital should endeavor to carry out is the preparation of a patient information book, variously called patients and visitors guide, patient handbook. Because ask any patient or visitor to a hospital, especially in a sprawling and multistoried building, what his most annoying or frustrating experience is. He will tell us that it is lack of information he needs or his attempt to knock on every door to get information.

Process Management

One of the most frequently heard criticisms against any hospital is the prolonged and seemingly interminable waiting a patient has to do at various stages of his visits to the hospital. It may happen in front of the registration, at the doctor's office, at the cashier, the laboratory, pharmacy, for and in between appointments and admitting. The large number of patients attending the outpatient clinics is not always the reason that makes people wait. There are other reasons such as inefficient and inadequate staff, cumbersome and time consuming forms and procedures, poorly planned and designed space which has not taken into account circulation, work flow and traffic flow resulting in a criss-cross traffic, extra steps and avoidable additional time. Hospital managements should study the problems and remedy them.

Assist the Patient at the Time Admission Process

Many of the patients who go through admitting are physically incapacitated and apprehensive. They and those accompanying them are in a state of mental stress. Delay in admission can cause them emotional trauma. Admitting function should take place in a pleasant and comfortable environment in which the patient is assured of privacy and individual attention.

Conclusion

Process is an essential ingredient in the production and delivery of service. It is essentially the procedures and patterns in the delivery of a service. Since the inseparable nature of services does not allow any differences in the production and delivery of a service, process becomes an all-inclusive 'P' for service marketers. Hospitals must pay as much attention to proper planning, designing, organizing and functioning of the various departments (specialties) as for any other department. Some facets of the out-patient department are maintained separately from the inpatient services. Never the less, the two should be integrated physically, functionally and from the clinical and administrative points of view. Because, in most of the cases the patient is examined and

given treatment in the out-patient department up to the time he/she is hospitalized. He/she is then admitted and cared for as an inpatient until he/she is discharged and the patient gets treated again in the out-patient department during convalescence. Besides these the other services like investigative procedures and counseling services will be there in the out-patient department.

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