



Original article

Expectations and perceptions of clients concerning the quality of care provided at a Brazilian hospital facility[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Purpose: To identify the expectations and perceptions of clients concerning the quality of hospital care provided to them and their respective companions at a private Brazilian hospital using SERVQUAL. The SERVQUAL questionnaire can provide information concerning expectations and perceptions of clients. In addition, it is able to identify the participation of frontline employees and how they contribute to the organization's end product (service delivery).

Methods: In total, 172 inpatients for surgical reasons answered the SERVQUAL questionnaire. It consists of 23 pairs of statements, 22 of which are distributed into the dimensions of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Statement 23 refers to the overall quality of care. Exploratory analysis, internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) and the kappa Coefficient were calculated using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences and SAS 9.2. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board at the Hospital das Clínicas at the University of São Paulo at Ribeirao Preto Medical School.

Results: Most participants had a bachelor's degree and were over than 60 years old. Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicated good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.93$) and high levels of agreement were observed (91.10%).

Conclusion: The SERVQUAL questionnaire was sensitive to items in each dimension for which clients' perceptions surpassed their expectations.

Implications for nursing management: The continuous quality assessment of health services is mandatory for nursing leadership. The nursing leadership can further explore the SERVQUAL with a view to better attending to the clients' expectations.

1. Introduction

Health systems in both developed and developing countries have increasingly discussed and explored the quality of healthcare services through evaluations (Rocha & Trevizan, 2009). Evaluations in the health field (Malik & Schiesari, 1998; Nashrath, Akkadechanunt, & Chontawan, 2011; Rocha & Trevizan, 2009) are intended to identify, measure and analyze the outcomes of services and work as tools to promote the improvement of such services and achieve the institution's goals (Malik & Schiesari, 1998, Thawesaengskulthai, Wongrukmit, & Dahlgard, 2015; Wibawa, Meyliana, Widjaja, & Hidayanto, 2016;

Gholami, Kavosi, & Khojastefar, 2016). In this perspective, quality implies the selection and adoption of several criteria based on evidences that include clients' satisfaction with the care they receive.

The hospital, as a service provider, should strive to surpass the expectations of clients, taking into account not only the work of the nursing and medical staff directly responsible for care delivery, but all the human resources directly or indirectly involved in the care process. Therefore, health institutions should constantly seek to improve their processes and continually assess their results, in addition to the normal structural improvements. Considering that the nursing staff has a constant and closer relationship with patients, these professionals are

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largely responsible for the assessment of clients concerning care delivery, and collect positive or negative results according to the development and delivery of care (Brahmbhatt, Baser, & Loshi, 2011; Kerber, Kirchof, Cezar-Vaz, & Silveira, 2010; Morais & Melleiro, 2013; Nashrath et al., 2011; Rocha & Trevizan, 2009). Thus, client satisfaction in the health field is a determinant indicator in measuring the quality of care (Al-Borie & Damanhour, 2013; Calixto-Olalde et al., 2011; Gholami et al., 2016; Heidarnia, Riazi-Isfahani, Abadi, & Mohseni, 2014; Kerber et al., 2010; Lafaiete, Motta, & Villa, 2011; Thawesaengskulthai et al., 2015).

In this scenario, nursing adopts quality as a model in which acceptable care meets the expectations of the care recipients and also of health workers themselves. In view of the transformations taking place in the traditional management model, institutions assume that not only should the expectations of the institution and its workers be met, but also that equal weight should be given to the expectations of clients and their family members (Antunes & Trevizan, 2000; Kerber et al., 2010).

The perspective of clients permits assessing care delivery, going beyond aspects related to structure, process and results (Calixto-Olalde et al., 2011; Nashrath et al., 2011). From this perspective, the care provided by the nursing staff needs to be enhanced through compassion, competence, awareness and confidence. These elements act as a differential in care delivery and can contribute to the horizontal relationship between client and professional, positively impacting one's perception concerning the services (Calixto-Olalde et al., 2011).

The subjectivity of research on satisfaction is frequently criticized. Clients do not have concrete indicators in order to evaluate the services they are receiving. Services are intangible and require evaluation during the process of development and delivery, impelling the service provider to keep a close relationship with the user. This study is based on the SERVQUAL, a tool that offers to clients the possibility to evaluate the service by means of concrete indicators of their own perceptions and expectations and not only aspects that the service providers believe are important to offer to the client. The tool permits the identification of potential gaps between clients' perceptions and expectations in terms of five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1991). In addition to being able to provide information on the clients' expectations and perceptions, SERVQUAL can identify the participation of employees working on the forefront and how they contribute to the organization's final product (service delivery). These professionals are in direct contact with clients, being responsible for direct action involving consumers and cooperating with managers in decision-making, enabling information regarding a product or service to reach managers, with a view to analyzing the quality of care delivery (Kotler & Keller, 2011). Achieving health service quality is possible when professionals consider the client's expectations and perceptions on the care delivered and understand the need to maintain proper interpersonal relationships with clients, promoting their wellbeing (Kerber et al., 2010; Kotler, Hayes, & Bloom, 2002; Lafaiete et al., 2011). The aim of this study is to identify the expectations and perceptions of clients concerning the quality of hospital care provided to them and their respective companions at a private Brazilian hospital by means of SERVQUAL.

2. Method

2.1. Design

This descriptive, cross-sectional, exploratory study with a quantitative approach was conducted at a private hospital facility located in a Brazilian city.

2.2. Setting and sample

Non-probabilistic sampling was used. A total of 172 clients participated in the study. Inclusion criteria were: clients of both genders,

aged between 18 and 80 years old, who completed middle school, sought the facility for hospitalization due to an elective surgery, and who were hospitalized for a period superior to 24 h, in physical, psychological, and emotional conditions to answer the survey at two moments: at the time of hospital admission and discharge, in order to measure expectations and perceptions.

2.3. Data collection

The SERVQUAL questionnaire was used to collect data during four months. It was originally developed by the Marketing Science Institute (MSI) to assess services, with the main objective of measuring functional quality in diverse service sectors. SERVQUAL has been used to support decision-making that leads to improvement of quality from the perspective of clients, seeking to close gaps between expectation and perception (Parasuraman et al., 1991). With respect to the hospital environment, the use of the SERVQUAL questionnaire is appropriate to assess expected quality and perceived quality from clients' perspectives. Such assessments have been identified in many publications addressing gaps between expectations and perceptions in the dimensions that involve quality, both from the perspective of clients and health workers (Calixto-Olalde et al., 2011; Cruz & Melleiro, 2010; Lee & Yom, 2007). The results of these publications show a need to incorporate and understand service quality, taking into account that all the professionals directly or indirectly involved in care delivery impact the process.

The version used in this study is the same used in a previous study conducted in Brazil (Berezovsky & Hercos, 2006), with the following adaptations, executed to find linguistic equivalence and retain similar meanings in the original and translated versions of the questionnaire: the words "foundation" and "team" were changed to "hospital" and "nursing", respectively. In addition, expectation means "expected care" and perception "delivered care". This questionnaire measures the quality of nursing services using two scales (expectation and perception), both of which comprise five dimensions of quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. The questionnaire is composed of 23 pairs of statements: 22 pairs are distributed among the dimensions *tangibles* (items 1 to 4), which refers to aspects of hospital facilities, attitude characteristics of the nursing team and their compatibility with the work environment, and the layout and content of documents delivered to the patients; *reliability* (items 5 to 9), in which the punctuality of hospital procedures is assessed, the availability and interest in responding to the patients' demands, besides precision in the execution of services and procedures, avoiding rework; *responsiveness* (items 10 to 13), related to the exactness of the information offered by the nursing team and the availability to respond to the patients' requests; *assurance* (items 14 to 17), concerning the trust and safety transmitted by the nursing team's behaviors, as well as to an attentive attitude in treating the patients; *empathy* (items 18 to 22), assessing whether the team offers personal care to its patients, prioritizing their interests and needs; while item 23 is exclusively related to the service's overall quality. Next, five statements are presented about characteristics of the care received at the hospital. The participant is asked to distribute 100 points among these five characteristics, according to their level of importance in his/her assessment. The more important the characteristic, the higher the score, making sure that the scores of the five characteristics add up to 100 points. Finally, information on age, marital status, education and reason for hospitalization was added to the questionnaire.

2.4. Data analysis

Exploratory analysis (frequencies) was applied and internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha), Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, Wilcoxon test and Kappa coefficients were calculated, using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 15.0 and SAS 9.2®.

Internal consistency was calculated through Cronbach's alpha,

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