Research Article

Training Effectiveness of Front Office Staff on Patient Happiness - A Case of Super Specialty Hospitals in India

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study examines the training effectiveness of front office staff on service quality at super specialty hospitals with special reference to Bengaluru city, India. Front office staff plays a crucial role in shaping the patient's first impression and reflection of overall experience later. Effective training is essential to enhance their skills, knowledge, and attitudes towards delivering exceptional service quality. This research aims to assess the impact of training programs on the performance of front office staff, focusing on key service quality dimensions such as responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and reliability. The study utilizes exploratory approach, using quantitative surveys from 150 patients visiting super specialty hospital were selected conveniently in Bengaluru city. Findings indicate that well-structured training programs significantly improve service quality, leading to higher patient satisfaction and better hospital reputation. Recommendations for hospital administrators include investing in continuous training programs and adopting a patient-centric approach to service delivery. **Keywords:** Training Effectiveness, Service Quality, Patient Happiness, Hospital Reputation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The healthcare industry in the realm of super specialty hospitals, places immense importance on patient satisfaction and happiness, in particular, as a critical determinant of success and reputation. Super specialty hospitals, known for offering advanced medical treatments and specialized care, cater to patients with complex and critical health issues. In such settings, the role of front office staff becomes pivotal. These staff members serve as the first point of contact for patients, managing appointments, inquiries, and administrative tasks that significantly influence the overall patient experience. As a result, the effectiveness of their training is crucial in ensuring high service quality and patient happiness.

Training programs for front office staff are designed to equip them with the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes required to handle their responsibilities efficiently and empathetically. These programs often cover a wide range of topics, including communication skills, customer service principles, hospital policies and procedures, and the use of hospital management software. Effective training ensures that front office staff can manage patient interactions smoothly, reduce wait times, handle patient records accurately, and provide compassionate service, all of which contribute to enhancing patient happiness.

The significance of training front office staff cannot be overstated in super speciality hospitals where patient expectations are high due to the complex nature of their healthcare needs. Patients in such hospitals often deal with anxiety and stress related to their health conditions. Therefore, a well-trained front office team can help alleviate these concerns by providing clear information, timely assistance, and a reassuring presence. Furthermore, the quality of service provided by front office staff can influence patients' perceptions of the entire hospital, affecting their overall satisfaction and likelihood of recommending the hospital to others.

Despite the critical role of front office staff, there is often a gap in research specifically focused on the effectiveness of their training and its impact on patient satisfaction/happiness in super speciality hospitals. Most studies tend to focus on clinical staff or overall hospital operations, leaving a significant area unexplored. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the relationship between training effectiveness for front office staff and patient happiness in super speciality hospitals.

To achieve this, the study will employ exploratory approach, using quantitative surveys and gathering primary data from patients. The quantitative component will involve surveys to measure the perceived effectiveness of training programs and patient satisfaction levels. The qualitative component will consist of in-depth interviews to gain deeper insights into the experiences and perceptions of the respondents.

Key service quality dimensions such as responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and reliability will be assessed in relation to the training programs. Responsiveness pertains to the ability of front office staff to promptly and effectively respond to patient inquiries and needs. Empathy involves the staff's capacity to understand and share the feelings of patients, providing comfort and support. Assurance relates to the staff's ability to convey trust and confidence, ensuring patients feel secure in the care they are receiving. Reliability involves the staff's consistency in delivering accurate and dependable service.

By focusing on these dimensions, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how training influences the service quality delivered by front office staff and, consequently, patient happiness. The findings will offer valuable insights for hospital administrators and policymakers, highlighting the importance of investing in continuous and targeted training programs for front office staff. Such investments are not only likely to improve patient satisfaction and happiness but also enhance the overall reputation and success of super-specialty hospitals.

2.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Training in the healthcare sector is critical for ensuring high standards of service quality and patient care. Studies have shown that effective training programs can lead to improved job performance, enhanced professional skills, and increased employee satisfaction **(Hoffmann et al., 2014).** In the context of front office staff, training is particularly important as these employees are often the first point of contact for patients, and their interactions can significantly influence patient perceptions of the healthcare facility **(Kim & Choi, 2016).** Service quality in super-specialty hospitals is multifaceted, encompassing various dimensions such as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy **(Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988).** High service quality is crucial for patient satisfaction, loyalty, and the overall reputation of the hospital **(Andaleeb, 2001).** Front office staff play a key role in delivering quality service by managing appointments, handling patient inquiries, and providing necessary information and support **(Duggirala, Rajendran, & Anantharaman, 2008).** Research has highlighted the direct relationship between training effectiveness and service quality in healthcare settings. For instance, a study by **Lee and Cummings (2008)** found that training programs focusing on communication skills and customer service principles significantly improved the service quality delivered by front office staff. Similarly, **Arnetz et al. (2011)** demonstrated that targeted training programs led to better patient interactions and higher satisfaction levels. Different training methods have been explored in the literature, including on-the-job training, workshops, simulations, and e-learning. Studies suggest that interactive and practical training methods, such as role-playing and simulations, are particularly effective in improving front-office staff performance **(Cook, Levinson, & Garside, 2010).** E-learning has also been shown to be a valuable tool for providing flexible and accessible training options, especially in busy healthcare environments **(Ruiz, Mintzer, & Leipzig, 2006).** Despite the recognized importance of training, several challenges persist in

effectively training front office staff in super specialty hospitals. These include limited resources, time constraints, and the need for ongoing training to keep up with evolving healthcare standards and technologies **(Frenk et al., 2010).** Furthermore, measuring the impact of training programs on service quality and patient satisfaction can be complex, requiring robust evaluation frameworks **(Salas et al., 2012).**The impact of training on employee performance extends beyond immediate job skills to include increased job satisfaction, motivation, and retention **(Kirkpatrick, 2006).** In the healthcare sector, where turnover rates can be high, effective training programs can help retain skilled front office staff, ensuring continuity and consistency in patient care **(Chauhan & Paul, 2013).** Additionally, continuous professional development opportunities can foster a culture of learning and improvement within the organization **(Davis et al., 2006).** Patient-centric training approaches focus on developing empathy, communication skills, and cultural competence among front office staff. Such approaches are essential for meeting the diverse needs of patients and providing personalized care **(Betancourt et al., 2005).** Training programs that emphasize patient-centered care have been shown to enhance patient satisfaction and loyalty **(Berwick, 2009).** Moreover, training in cultural competence can help front office staff better understand and address the needs of patients from various backgrounds **(Beach et al., 2005).** Evaluating the effectiveness of training programs is critical for continuous improvement. The Kirkpatrick Model is widely used for this purpose, assessing training outcomes across four levels: reaction, learning, behavior, and results **(Kirkpatrick, 2006).** Applying this model in healthcare settings can help organizations identify areas for improvement and ensure that training programs are aligned with organizational goals and patient needs **(Yardley & Dornan, 2012).**

3. NEED FOR THE STUDY

Patient satisfaction/happiness is a critical indicator of the quality of care provided by healthcare institutions, particularly in super specialty hospitals. These hospitals serve patients with complex and often severe health conditions, making the patient experience an essential component of their overall care journey. Front office staff are the initial point of contact for patients and their families, and their interactions can significantly influence patient perceptions and satisfaction levels. Ensuring that these staff members are adequately trained to meet the high standards expected in super specialty care is crucial, as patient satisfaction or happiness directly impacts the hospital's reputation and success.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To study the importance of continuous professional development for front office staff.

2. To investigate how training influences the service quality provided by front office staff.

3. To analyze the effectiveness of front office staff training on patient happiness.
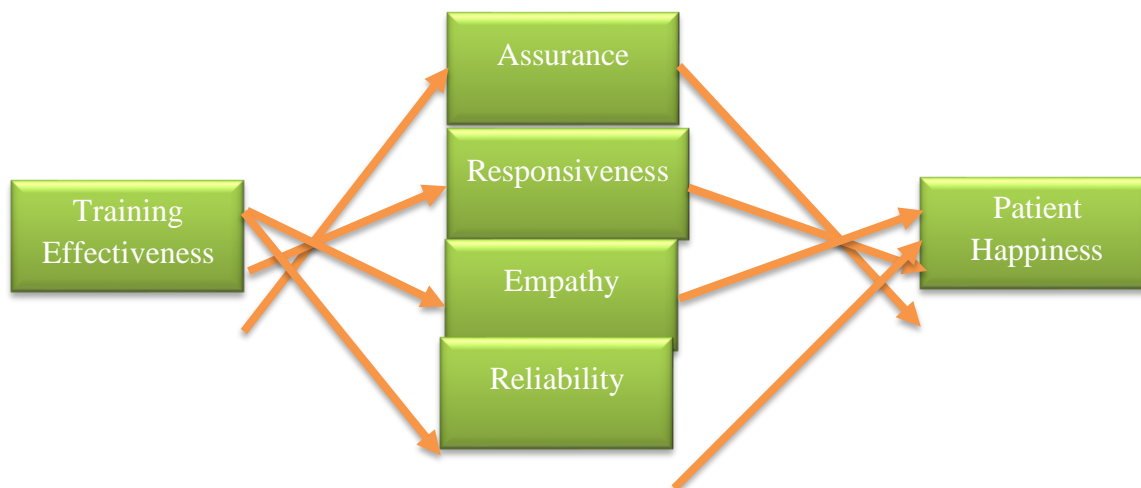
4.1 Conceptual Model of the Study

Fig 1: Conceptual Model of the Study

This Conceptual model focuses on how well the front office staff are trained in these four key areas. Assurance, Responsiveness, Empathy, and Reliability: and how these are the key dimensions of service quality that would directly influence patient happiness. Effective training in these areas equips front office staff with the skills and knowledge and ability necessary to provide high-quality service. The outcome of the model is the happiness and satisfaction of patients. When front office staff are well-trained in assurance, responsiveness, empathy, and reliability, it leads to: Increased trust and confidence in the healthcare provider. Reduced anxiety and stress for patients, as they feel understood and well-cared for a more positive overall experience, as patients feel their needs are met promptly and reliably aiding to Overall happiness of the patients related to quality of services offered.

4.2 Hypotheses of the Study

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant relationship between training effectiveness and service quality dimensions influencing patient happiness.

Alternate Hypothesis (H_1): There is significant relationship between training effectiveness and service quality dimensions influencing patient happiness.

5. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.

A. Research Design: The study employs a conclusive-based approach, using quantitative research methodologies. This approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of training programs for front office staff and their impact on patient satisfaction in super specialty hospitals.

B. Sampling Technique: One of the sampling units to be sampled in a super-specialty hospital is the Administration staff. The responses of the patients have to be collected to enable an accurate assessment of the application of total service quality [TSQ] dimensions across these four organizational units mentioned above. A sample of one hundred each would be selected by an ordered random sampling without replacement method [ORSWRM][1]. The process of ordered sampling is this: The sampling unit   [be it a Doctor/ Nurse/Training personnel/ Admin staff] who comes first to respond would be requested for the data needed for the study. Then, in a sequence those who arrive are approached and apprised about the study to impress on the importance and relevance in the context of changing business scenario. After their concurrence, the professional would be interviewed and responses documented. There is orderliness in the selection in terms of sequence and randomness is inbuilt into it. No researcher can have an idea of a particular professional being approached for data set. Hence randomness operates. Local control and replication are a part of experimentation. An environment would be built-in for ease of reflection. In case a professional is noticed to have shown reluctance or negligence or not truthful, the data would not be used for further analysis.

C. Data Collection: There was cooperation from the hospital organizations selected for the study. As such, the functionaries were response although not at one go. We had to wait repeat the visit on average five time to make a successful visit.

The real issue was the data to be collected from the Patient population. As described above, they were selected using ORSWRM method. There were many who showed their disinterest and rejected our request. However, one out of eight in a sequence would accept and respond to our request for data from them. The characteristics of them were generally referred to by their respective family physicians. The response time for each questionnaire worked out to be thirty minutes. This was a big time lent to the researcher for their concentration would be on meeting the specialist for a solution to their problems. The patients who were on the corridors of Out Patient Department [OPD] were only selected. No patient was interviewed from an inpatient population. The hospital had advised us not conduct surveys from such patients as there would not proper reflections for questions listed to be responded. The average time taken for completing a questionnaire was twenty minutes.

d. TOOLS OF ANALYSIS

The data collected were transcribed in an excel format to facilitate for further analysis. The variables were appropriately coded and cross checked for elimination of transcription errors. The outliers were observed for 3-σ limits. Those observations that crossed 3-σ limits were eliminated from the analysis.

The choice of tools of analysis is dependent on the research problem, identified parameters and the hypotheses being tested. The tools of analysis have been identified on the basis of the need to derive results from the data sets. The following tools are identified and used later in the analysis of data. The tolls are: 1. Factor analysis, 2. Reliability analysis 3. Regression analysis. Further descriptions are done of each of these tools selected for the study.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for Front Office Staffs

Continuous professional development (CPD) is vital for front office staff in super specialty hospitals as it directly impacts the quality of service they provide. Front office staff are often the first point of contact for patients, and their ability to handle inquiries, manage appointments, and address concerns efficiently can significantly influence patient satisfaction. Regular training and development ensure that these employees are equipped with the latest skills and knowledge to perform their duties effectively, leading to improved patient interactions and overall service quality **(McConnell, 2013).**

Continuous professional development for front office staff in super specialty hospitals is essential for enhancing service quality, keeping up with technological advancements, adapting to regulatory changes, and improving communication skills. It also boosts employee morale and job satisfaction, promotes career advancement, ensures consistency in service delivery, supports a culture of excellence, and enhances problem-solving skills. By investing in the ongoing development of front office staff, hospitals can ensure that they provide the highest quality of care and service, ultimately leading to better patient happiness and overall success.

6.2. Importance of training influencing the service quality provided by front office staff

Training plays a crucial role in enhancing the service quality provided by front office staff in super specialty hospitals. Well-designed training programs equip front office personnel with the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their duties effectively and efficiently. Through continuous professional development, front office staff learn best practices in customer service, communication, and problem-solving, which are essential for creating positive patient experiences. Training helps staff understand the importance of empathy, active listening, and responsiveness, enabling them to address patient inquiries, concerns, and complaints with professionalism and care. Additionally, training in the use of hospital information systems and electronic health records (EHRs) ensures that front office staff can manage appointments, patient data, and administrative tasks accurately and swiftly, reducing wait times and increasing overall service efficiency.

Moreover, training programs that include modules on cultural competence and sensitivity prepare the front office staff to interact respectfully and effectively with patients from diverse backgrounds. This is particularly important in super speciality hospitals, where patients may have varying needs and expectations. By being well-versed in cultural nuances and appropriate communication styles, front office staff can provide personalized and respectful service, enhancing patient satisfaction and trust. Training also fosters a sense of confidence and competence among staff, which is reflected in their interactions with patients. When front office staff feel well-prepared and supported, they are more likely to exhibit a positive attitude and a willingness to go above and beyond to meet patient needs, thereby significantly improving the overall quality of service provided.

6.3. Analyzing the effectiveness of front office staff training on patient satisfaction

A. Factor Analysis

Table 1: KMO- Bartlett's Test

Source: Field Survey and Primary Data from Patients of Super Speciality Hospital in Bangalore City, Karnataka in the Study Area March 2024

Sl.No	Variables	KMO Value	Significance	DF
1	Training Effectiveness	0.737	0.000	6
2	Service Quality Dimensions	0.835	0.000	11
3	Patients Happiness	0.697	0.000	8

Factor analysis is carried out to determine the KMO value of independent and dependent variables 0.737, 0.835, and 0.697 respectively, showing the grouping of variable is valid enough to carry out the further analysis with the significance value of 0.000 with Df 6, 11 and 8 respectively for the variable Training Effectiveness, Service Quality Dimensions and Patients Happiness.

B. Reliability Results

Table 2: Reliability Results of Variables

Source: Field Survey and Primary Data from Patients of Super Speciality Hospital in Bangalore City, Karnataka in the Study Area March 2024

Factors	Cronbach's constant	Number of Items
Training Effectiveness	.743	5
Assurance	.894	4
Responsiveness	.887	4
Empathy	.934	5
Reliability	.955	5
Patient Satisfaction	.819	4

The above table 2, describe the reliability analysis states the value of 'Cronbach's Alpha' helps in checking internal consistency of factor grouping and it shows that all the factors that are grouped in rotated component matrix is greater than 0.7 i.e., 70%, hence the homogenous grouping formed in the rotated component matrix by overcoming or eliminating the underlying factors is valid and useful for the further analysis.

C. Results of Regression Analysis – Training Effectiveness and Service Quality Variables

Table 3: Regression Result of Variables

Source: Field Survey and Primary Data from Patients of Super Specialty Hospital in Bangalore City, Karnataka in the Study Area April 2024

Key Variables	Independent Variable	Stnd coefficients (Beta)	Sig
Assurance		.756	.004
Responsiveness		.873	.001
Empathy	Training Effectiveness	.809	.000
Reliability		.903	.000

a. From the above table we understand that with the significance value being .004, which is less than 0.05, it is highly significant. The variable training effectiveness influences variable Assurance having an association of 75.6%.and we accept the alternate hypothesis which depicts the importance of Training effectiveness in developing assurance as a service quality variable. We infer that the training provided equips the front office staff to improve their competency and become more courteous and credible for patients to develop confidence and trust in services catered by the front office.

b. From the above table we understand that with the significance value being .001 states which is less than 0.05, it is highly significant which states that training effectiveness influences variable responsiveness; with an association of 87.3% and we accept the alternate hypothesis. The results show that Training programs have achieved their projected outcomes in improving the responsiveness of the Front office staff which means that training programs have made front office staff equip skills to be quick and effective in responding to patients' queries. Their timely services have made them more reliable which contributes to overall patient happiness.

c. From the above table we understand that with the significance value being .000, which is less than 0.05, it is highly significant. the variable training effectiveness influences variable empathy; the association being 80.9%. and we accept the alternate hypotheses suggesting that training programs and empathy are interconnected and these training programs will raise the Front office staff's ability to understand patients and build trust and rapport with them through effective communication.

d. From the above table we understand that with the significance value being .000, which is less than 0.05, it is highly significant which suggests that variable training effectiveness has an influence on variable reliability, with the value of association at 90.3%. We accept the alternate hypothesis which depicts that when Training programs are well delivered meeting its core objective of developing skills and abilities which aims at enhancing front office staff's ability to cater services consistently and within the promised time making them more reliable.

D. Results of Regression Analysis Patient Happiness with Service Quality Variables

Table 4: Regression Result of Variables

Source: Field Survey and Primary Data from Patients of Super Specialty Hospital in Bangalore City, Karnataka in the Study Area April 2024

Key Variables	Dependent Variable	Stnd coefficients (Beta)	Sig
Assurance		.867	.002
Responsiveness		.916	.000
Empathy	Patient Happiness	.898	.003
Reliability		.894	.000

a. From the above table we understand that with the significance value being .002, which is less than 0.05, it is highly significant which shows that the variable assurance has an influence on patient happiness, the value of association being 86.7%. From the results we accept the Alternate hypothesis and the results depict that Assurance is a key component of service quality when it comes to patient happiness. If the front of staff is professional, polite, and trustworthy they give reassurance for patients to feel happy about the services they received.

b. From the above table we understand that with the significance value being .000, which is less than 0.05, it is highly significant which explains that variable responsiveness has a strong influence on patient happiness, the value being high at 91.6%. From the results, we accept the alternative hypothesis and it

shows that responsiveness is the key element for patient happiness because if front office staff are quick in addressing the queries, and keep the patients communicated with the process, they will be able to cater to individual patient needs where the patients feel respected and looked after.

c. From the above table we understand that with the significance value being .003, which is less than 0.05, it is highly significant which depicts variable empathy has an influence on patient happiness, the association being at 89.8%. From the results, we accept the alternate hypothesis it suggests that empathy is the foundation of front office operations and that being empathetic can enable them to provide an environment that is stress-free and builds trust for patients to feel that their concerns are addressed and will contribute to the overall positive experience with the services provided.

d.From the above table we understand that with the significance value being .000, which is less than 0.05, it is highly significant which states that the variable reliability has an influence on patient happiness with a value of 89.4%. From the results we accept the alternate hypothesis and the above results show that when front office staff are reliable, they will be able to demonstrate services that build trust and provide Reassurance on a continuous and efficient basis which contributes to overall patient happiness.

6. CONCLUSION

The effectiveness of training programs for front office staff in super specialty hospitals plays a pivotal role in shaping patient Happiness. As the initial point of contact, front office staff significantly influence patients' first impressions and overall experiences. This study has underscored the critical importance of continuous professional development (CPD) for these staff members in enhancing service quality and patient satisfaction Through well-structured training programs, front office staff can acquire and refine essential skills in communication, empathy, problem-solving, and the use of technology. These skills are integral to delivering high-quality service, managing patient inquiries efficiently, and ensuring that administrative processes are handled smoothly. Training ensures that staff are proficient in the latest hospital information systems and electronic health records (EHRs), which is crucial for maintaining accuracy and efficiency in patient management. Additionally, training programs that emphasize cultural competence and sensitivity help staff interact effectively with patients from diverse backgrounds, fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment.

The correlation between well-trained front office staff and high patient happiness is evident. When front office staff are equipped with the right skills and knowledge, they can provide prompt, courteous, and effective service, which enhances the overall patient experience. Patients who encounter knowledgeable and empathetic staff are more likely to feel valued and understood, leading to higher levels of satisfaction. The ability of front office staff to manage their tasks efficiently, reduce wait times, and handle patient information accurately contributes to a seamless and positive patient journey.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that super-speciality hospitals invest in comprehensive and ongoing training programs for their front office staff. These programs should be tailored to address the specific needs of the staff and the patients they serve. Incorporating feedback mechanisms can help in continuously refining the training content and methods. Additionally, hospitals should foster a culture that values and supports continuous learning and professional growth.

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