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Research Article

The Effects of Korean Medical Service Quality and Satisfaction on Revisit Intention of the United Arab Emirates Government Sponsored Patients

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SUMMARY

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to investigate medical service quality, satisfaction and to examine factors influencing hospital revisit intention of the United Arab Emirates government sponsored patients in Korea.**Methods:** A total of 152 UAE government sponsored patients who visited Korean hospitals participated in the questionnaire survey from August to November 2016. Stepwise multiple regression was used to identify the factors that affected the revisit intention of the participants.**Results:** The mean scores of medical service quality, satisfaction, and revisit intention were 5.72 out of 7, 88.88 out of 100, 4.59 out of 5, respectively. Medical service quality and satisfaction, Medical service quality and revisit intention, satisfaction and revisit intention were positively correlated. Medical service of physician, visiting routes and responsiveness of medical service quality explained about 23.8% of revisit intention.**Conclusions:** There are needs for physicians to communicate with patients while ensuring sufficient consultation time based on excellent medical skills and nurses to respond immediately for the patients' needs through an empathic encounter in order to improve medical service quality and patient satisfaction so that to increase the revisit intention of the United Arab Emirates government sponsored patients. Further, it is necessary for the hospitals to have support plans for providing country specialized services in consideration of the UAE culture to ensure that physicians' and nurses' competencies are not undervalued by non-medical service elements such as interpreters and meals.© 2017 Korean Society of Nursing Science, Published by Elsevier Korea LLC. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Introduction

With the growth of the Korean economy and the decline in employment rate in the 2000s, the domestic service industry, which accounts for 59.4% of total GDP and 69.2% of the total number employed as of the end of 2014, is being proposed as a solution to the employment rate problem [1]. In particular, the importance of the medical service industry is increasing as it contributes to the national economy as a high-value-added industry that creates various economic effects, including shared growth through merging with other industries such as medical devices and

pharmaceuticals, and job creation, with hopes of market size expansion in the future [2].

The total number of foreign patients who visited Korea in 2014 was 266,501, an increase of 26.2% compared to the previous year [3]. Among them, the countries with the highest annual increase rate of foreign patients in Korea out of 191 countries were from the Middle East, with an annual average increase rate of 174.2% [3]. In particular, the number of patients from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) had an increase rate of 128.8% in 2014, compared to the previous year, which is the second highest following Kazakhstan, which had an increase rate of 177.8% [3].

UAE patients' total medical expenses increased to 40.4 billion Korean won, by 98.0% year over year, and the cost per patient was estimated at 15.37 million Korean won [4]. This is about 7 times higher than the average medical cost per foreign patient of 208 million won, and the highest level among the 191 countries that the

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foreign patients come from. Among the total 2633 UAE patients who visited Korea, 806 were patients sent by the government, accounting for 30.6%, generating medical revenues around 35 billion won [4]. Recently, the UAE government sponsored patients are growing rapidly through the cooperation between the two governments and it is a market with high hopes that is expected to generate high profits in the future. Therefore, efforts should be made to vitalize the visit of UAE patients and increase the rate of return visits.

With the increase in income, patients' expectations and knowledge levels of medical services are increasing. In addition, medical services are changing from medical personnel centered services in the past, to patient-centered systems that reflect the patients' needs, and in which patients can participate in the medical planning process. Therefore, hospitals need to make voluntary efforts to improve the quality of care and satisfaction in order to cope with such changes. According to Zifko-Baliga and Krampf [5], even though healthcare providers may have provided the best medical services to the patient, if the patient does not agree, then one cannot say that high quality health care service has been provided. As the importance of the quality of the medical services recognized by the patient is being emphasized, studies are being actively carried out to identify the influencing factors of the revisit intention for the medical services including the relationship between the quality and satisfaction of medical service [6–10].

Satisfaction being the mediating factor between customer perceived quality levels and customer loyalty, if the service quality levels are satisfied, customers are satisfied, and such satisfaction levels affect customer loyalty [6]. In other words, when service quality offered to the customer is higher than expected service quality levels, customers perceive the service quality level as high; this in turn affect satisfaction and repurchase intentions [11]. Therefore, in order to enhance the satisfaction of patients' medical services through the provision of high-quality medical services, and to increase intent to revisit through recommendations of others, it is necessary to provide customized services according to the individual characteristics of the patients.

Therefore, it is necessary to establish a basis for raising the quality of medical service provided to UAE patients who are rapidly increasing in the Korean medical service market with a high economic ripple effect, and to improve the satisfaction of patients to increase the intent to revisit domestic hospitals. The purpose of this study is to present the basic data that can contribute to the vitalization of UAE patients by analyzing the effect of domestic medical service quality and medical service satisfaction levels of UAE government sponsored patients, which influence the intent to revisit hospitals.

Methods

Study design

The purpose of this descriptive, survey research study was to investigate medical service quality, satisfaction and to examine factors influencing hospital revisit intention of the UAE government sponsored patients who experienced Korean medical service for treatment.

Sample and setting

The target population for this study was the UAE government sponsored patients who were treated at one of the 12 Korean hospitals which signed the hospital service agreement between Korea and UAE. The participants of the study were the patients or caregivers who visited the UAE Military Attaché's Office or the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Korea and understand the

purpose of the study and agree to answer the questionnaire. The questionnaire was carried out by staff members who were in charge of the administrative tasks of each organization and has received pre-training on the purpose and method of the survey. They were able to speak Korean and Arabic. A soldier or his family visits Korea through GHQ Armed Forces of the UAE, and the other general public visits through the IPC of Health Authority of Abu Dhabi. The necessary sample size was computed using G*Power 3.1.9.2 for the stepwise multiple regression analysis with a significant level of 0.05, a power of 0.8. The median effect size is expected to be 0.15 and expected 18 predictor variables, so minimum of 150 participants were needed for this study. A total of 200 survey copies were distributed, approximately 180 copies were collected (recovery rate of 90.0%), but only 152 copies were analyzed. Twenty-eight copies (15.6% dropout rate) which had many missing data were omitted. Therefore, the minimum number of subjects required for statistical testing was met.

The participants' selection criteria of this study were as follows. First, the UAE government sponsored patients over 18 years old who were admitted to a hospital in Korea based on the hospital service agreement between Korea and the UAE for the purpose of treatment or their caregivers. Second, the participants who understood the purpose of this study and voluntarily agree to participate in this survey. Third, the participants who could fill out the questionnaire and had no problem in collecting accurate information.

Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the Institutional Chungbuk National University (IRB-CBNU-201608-BMSB333-01). The data collector introduced the purpose of the study to the participants and explained that when they fill out the survey it would be regarded as the consent of the survey participation. The explanatory text of the study included the data collection process, participation agreement, withdrawal decision, and confidentiality of participation in the study. In other words, it was explained that anonymity was guaranteed and the participants could be withdrawn at any time, the survey contents were used only for research purpose, and the survey and all the collected information would be dismantled after the research had completed. The survey was conducted through self-filling questionnaires. The collected data were coded after the collection and entered into the computer.

Measurements

Twenty-two questions of SERVPERF (Service Performance) by Cronin and Taylor [12], a modified version of SERVQUAL (Service Quality) developed by Parasuraman and colleagues [11], was used as a medical service quality measurement instrument. English version of SERVPERF was translated into Arabic. SERVPERF, a 22-question on a 7-point Likert scale model, includes 5 dimensions which were entitled tangibles (4) as 'the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials', reliability (5) as 'the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately', responsiveness (4) as 'the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service assurance (4) as 'the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence and empathy (5) as 'the caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers'. This study has total of 22 questions on a 7-point Likert scales ranges from 1 as 'strongly disagree' to 7 as 'strongly agree' and the higher the score, the better the medical service quality. The overall Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the instrument was 0.97, and for each dimensions Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.90 for tangible (4), 0.92 for reliability, 0.92 for responsiveness, 0.93 for assurance, and 0.91 for empathy.

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