A study of service quality affecting the re-use of services of those who use the services of the Internal Medicine Clinic, Department of Internal Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Vajira Hospital, Navamindradhiraj University

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Abstract

Background and Aim: With the rising demand for healthcare services, it has become increasingly vital for hospitals to identify factors that influence patient loyalty and the likelihood of returning for services. The Internal Medicine Clinic at Vajira Hospital, serving a diverse patient population, aims to ensure high-quality service to enhance patient satisfaction and retention. This study investigates the relationship between service quality and patients' likelihood of returning, considering various personal factors. Specifically, the research identifies how dimensions of service quality—such as reliability and trust—impact repeat usage, thus contributing valuable insights to healthcare service management literature.

Materials and Methods: This study employed a quantitative research design and a systematic random sampling method to select 400 patients with multiple clinic visits. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire that measured patients' perceptions of service quality and their repeat usage intentions. The questionnaire covered demographic factors (age, marital status, education, occupation, income) and dimensions of service quality (tangibility, reliability, assurance, empathy, and responsiveness). Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) summarized demographic data, while inferential statistics (T-test, F-test, and multiple regression analysis) assessed relationships between service quality factors and repeat usage intentions.

Results: The analysis indicated significant differences in repeat visit rates across demographic categories, with factors such as age, marital status, education level, occupation, and income influencing patients' decisions to return to the clinic. Multiple regression analysis further revealed that service quality dimensions—particularly tangibility, reliability, and trust—had a statistically significant positive impact on the likelihood of repeat visits, with findings significant at the.05 level. These results emphasize the importance of delivering high-quality, reliable, and trustworthy services to foster patient loyalty and ongoing patronage.

Conclusion: This study underscores the critical role of service quality in shaping patients' decisions to return to Vajira Hospital's Internal Medicine Clinic. Key service quality dimensions, including reliability and trust, notably affect patient loyalty, suggesting that healthcare providers can enhance patient satisfaction and retention by focusing on these aspects of service delivery. Future research should explore qualitative dimensions of patient experiences to provide a richer understanding of factors influencing repeat usage in healthcare settings.

Keywords: Service Quality, Patient Loyalty, Repeat Visits, Healthcare Management, Internal Medicine Clinic

Introduction

In Thailand, the Ministry of Public Health oversees the country's health services, ensuring the health and well-being of the population through a comprehensive health system that encompasses health promotion, disease prevention, medical treatment, and rehabilitation. The health service framework is organized across various levels primary, secondary, and tertiary care each with distinct roles and responsibilities, interconnected by a referral system designed to deliver quality services under the health insurance system (Worapongpat, 2023).

A 20-year national strategy has been established, defining Thailand's vision as a stable, prosperous, and sustainable developed country, with a focus on implementing the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy. This philosophy serves as a foundation for future development, particularly in enhancing service quality, addressing public health disparities, and maximizing the effectiveness of health service facilities (Boonkong et al., 2020). The commitment to fairness in health service delivery

is crucial, as it aims to reduce inequality and improve the capabilities of health service facilities in line with their designated service levels (Worapongpat, 2022).

Vajira Hospital, affiliated with the Faculty of Medicine at Navamindradhiraj University, operates under the principles outlined in the national strategy. Its mission encompasses educational administration, training, and the provision of quality medical services, alongside producing graduates and specialists across various fields. (Worapongpat, et al., 2024) The Faculty aims to enhance medical education curricula to meet international standards while promoting research and medical innovation (Horton & Cole, 2011). Statistics indicate that the hospital services approximately 400,000 to 700,000 patients annually, with the Department of Internal Medicine receiving the highest patient volume (Soloslikit & Khantith, 2019) and (Worapongpat, & Somchob, 2024)

The internal medicine clinic plays a crucial role in delivering specialized care, focusing on various health issues, including diabetes, hypertension, hypercholesterolemia, kidney disease, and pulmonary conditions. Internists serve as personal physicians and health consultants, providing comprehensive care and coordinating referrals to specialists when necessary (Manikulsap, 2023; Tianthong et al., 2021). Given the increasing patient visits and the importance of quality service delivery, this study investigates the factors influencing service quality and its effect on patients' decisions to return to the internal medicine clinic at Vajira Hospital, Navamindradhiraj University. The objective is to enhance service quality to ensure patient satisfaction and loyalty, ultimately contributing to improved health outcomes and reinforcing the hospital's commitment to excellence in healthcare delivery.

Objectives

1.To compare the frequency of repeat service usage among recipients of the Internal Medicine Clinic at Vajira Hospital, Navamindradhiraj University, classified by various personal factors.

2.To investigate the quality of service that influences the likelihood of repeat visits to the Internal Medicine Clinic among service recipients at Vajira Hospital, Navamindradhiraj University.

Literature review

Service quality is a crucial determinant in the healthcare sector, significantly influencing patient satisfaction and their likelihood of returning for future services. The SERVQUAL model, developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988), identifies five key dimensions of service quality: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Each dimension plays a significant role in shaping patient perceptions and experiences, ultimately affecting their decisions to reuse healthcare services. Worapongpat & Somchob (2024).

Tangibility

Tangibility refers to the physical aspects of service delivery, such as the cleanliness of facilities and the professionalism of staff. According to Pandee (2019), patients in private hospitals often associate high tangibility with superior service quality, which influences their loyalty and intention to return. This finding aligns with Nilpat's (2018) research, which demonstrates that well-maintained hospital environments positively correlate with patient satisfaction and repeat visits. By ensuring that the physical aspects of service delivery meet patient expectations, healthcare facilities can create a more inviting and reassuring atmosphere for patients. Worapongpat, N., Wongkumchai, T., & Anuwatpreecha, T. (2024).

Reliability

Reliability is the ability of a service provider to deliver promised services consistently and accurately. Research by Boonkong et al. (2020) emphasizes that reliable service delivery is fundamental in healthcare settings, as patients place significant trust in medical professionals. When hospitals adhere to their commitments and provide accurate diagnoses and treatments, patients are more likely to return for future services (Daengkhan, 2020). A focus on enhancing reliability not only fosters patient trust but also encourages long-term relationships between patients and healthcare providers. Worapongpat & Bhasabutr (2024)

Responsiveness

The responsiveness of healthcare providers refers to their willingness to assist patients and provide timely services. A study by Cardin et al. (2003) suggests that prompt responses to patient inquiries and needs significantly enhance patient satisfaction, leading to increased repeat usage. In the context of Vajira Hospital, ensuring that patients feel prioritized and attended to can substantially improve their overall experience and likelihood of returning. This dimension highlights the importance of effective communication and quick service delivery in meeting patient needs.

Assurance

Assurance encompasses the knowledge and courtesy of staff, as well as their ability to inspire confidence. Research conducted by Yamane (1967) indicates that healthcare professionals who demonstrate expertise and provide reassuring communication can foster trust among patients. This trust is vital for encouraging repeat visits, as patients are more likely to seek care from providers they perceive as knowledgeable and caring. Enhancing assurance through staff training and professional development can create a more supportive environment for patients.

Empathy

Finally, empathy involves providing personalized attention to patients. According to Nonglak Promtingkarn et al. (2017), patients who perceive their healthcare providers as empathetic and attentive to their individual needs are more likely to report satisfaction and return for services. The emphasis on empathy underscores the importance of understanding patients' emotional and psychological needs in healthcare delivery. By fostering a culture of empathy, healthcare providers can enhance the patient experience and promote loyalty.

The literature underscores the significant impact of service quality on patients' intentions to reuse healthcare services. By enhancing the dimensions of service quality tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy hospitals like Vajira Hospital can improve patient satisfaction and foster loyalty among service users. A deeper understanding of these dimensions and their interconnectedness is essential for developing strategies that effectively address patient needs and expectations.

Conceptual Framework

Independent Variables

Service Quality Dimensions

Tangibility: Refers to the physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel, which contribute to patients' first impressions and perceptions of service quality.

Reliability: Represents the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately, establishing trust in healthcare delivery.

Responsiveness: Indicates the willingness of healthcare providers to help patients and provide prompt service, thereby enhancing patient satisfaction and loyalty.

Assurance: Encompasses the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their capacity to inspire trust and confidence among patients.

Empathy: Involves providing caring, individualized attention to patients, addressing their unique needs and fostering a supportive environment.

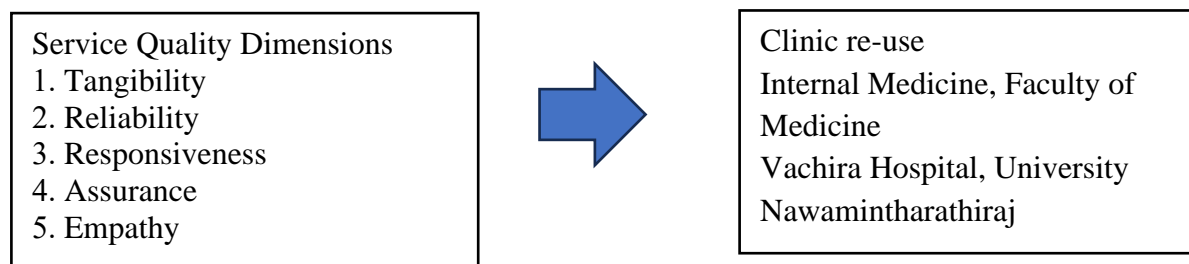Independent variable   Dependent variable

| Service Quality Dimensions
1. Tangibility
2. Reliability
3. Responsiveness
4. Assurance
5. Empathy | → | Clinic re-use
Internal Medicine, Faculty of Medicine
Vachira Hospital, University Nawamintharathiraj |

Figure 1 : Research concept framework

Methodology

The research study titled "The Quality of Service That Affects the Repeat Use of Services by Users of the Internal Medicine Clinic, Department of Internal Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Vajira Hospital, Navamindradhiraj University, Bangkok" employs a quantitative research design to quantify the relationship between service quality and patients' repeat visits. This approach was chosen to align with the study's objective of measuring and analyzing how various service quality dimensions influence patients' decisions to return to the clinic.

Sample Selection

The target population consisted of individuals who utilized the Internal Medicine Clinic at Vajira Hospital, with a total of 283,411 patients reported in 2022. Using Taro Yamane's formula for determining sample size, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, the researcher calculated an appropriate sample size of 400 participants. Systematic random sampling was then employed to select patients from the clinic's population, ensuring a representative sample.

Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of three sections:

Personal Data: This section gathers demographic information from respondents, including gender, age, marital status, education level, occupation, and average monthly income.

Service Quality: The five dimensions of service quality Tangibility, Reliability, Assurance, Responsiveness, and Empathy were evaluated in this section to assess patients' perceptions of the clinic's service standards.

Repeat Use of Services: This section evaluates the likelihood of participants returning to the Internal Medicine Clinic, reflecting their inclination toward repeat usage.

To ensure reliability and validity, the questionnaire underwent a content validity assessment. A panel of experts was consulted, and the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) was established at a value of 1.00. Additionally, the questionnaire's internal consistency was verified with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.901, indicating high reliability.

Data Analysis

Following data collection, descriptive statistics, including frequency, mean, percentage, and standard deviation, were calculated to summarize demographic data and general responses. For hypothesis testing, multiple regression analysis was utilized to explore the impact of each service quality dimension on the likelihood of repeat visits. This approach allowed for a comprehensive examination of the predictive strength of each dimension on patient retention. The analysis was conducted using [name of statistical software], and any significant findings were further explored through post hoc tests where applicable.

Methodological Limitations

The study acknowledges potential limitations, such as biases from self-reported data. Future research could incorporate a mixed-methods approach to validate quantitative findings with qualitative insights, thereby offering a more holistic understanding of patients' experiences.

Results

Table 1: Likelihood of Returning to the Vajira Hospital Internal Medicine Clinic Based on Gender

Gender	N	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD	t	Sig. (p)
Male	154	3.9756	0.71445	1.053	0.293
Female	246	4.0508	0.66121		

Significance level: 0.05

From Table 1, the mean score for females (4.0508) is slightly higher than for males (3.9756) regarding their likelihood to return to the Internal Medicine Clinic. However, the t-value (1.053) and p-value (0.293) indicate that this difference is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Thus, there is no significant difference in repeat service usage between male and female patients.

Table 2: Return Visits to Services Classified by Personal Factors

Personal Factors	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD	Statistical Test	Sig. (p)	Summary
Gender	Male = 3.9756 Female = 4.0508	Male = 0.71445 Female = 0.66121	t = 1.053	0.293	No significant difference
Age	-	-	F = 3.315	0.011	Significant difference
Status	-	-	F = 3.141	0.044	Significant difference

Personal Factors	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD	Statistical Test	Sig. (p)	Summary
Education Level	-	-	F = 4.845	0.008	Significant difference
Occupation	-	-	F = 4.383	0.001	Significant difference
Income	-	-	F = 3.019	0.007	Significant difference

Note: Each variable analysis uses a significance level of 0.05.

Table 3: Likelihood of Returning to the Vajira Hospital Internal Medicine Clinic Based on Age

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	Sig. (p)
Between Groups	6.032	4	1.508	3.315	0.011*
Within Group	179.714	395	0.455		
Total	185.746	399			

Significance level: 0.05

From Table 2, the F-value is 3.315 with a p-value of 0.011, which is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This indicates that there is a significant difference in the likelihood of returning to the clinic among different age groups.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis of Service Quality Affecting Return Visits

Service Quality Factors	(B)	SE	(Beta)	t	Sig. (p)	Summary
Tangibility of Service	0.369	0.119	0.178	3.116	0.002	Significant effect
Reliability of Service	0.355	0.124	0.186	2.865	0.004	Significant effect
Responsiveness to Service Recipients	-0.102	0.073	-0.084	-1.389	0.166	No significant effect
Assurance to Service Recipients	0.201	0.097	0.134	2.076	0.039	Significant effect
Knowing and Understanding Service Recipients	0.149	0.086	0.098	1.743	0.082	No significant effect

Note: Each variable analysis uses a significance level of 0.05.

Table 5: Likelihood of Returning to Vajira Hospital Internal Medicine Clinic Based on Marital Status

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	Sig. (p)
Between Groups	2.894	2	1.447	3.141	0.044*
Within Group	182.853	397	0.461		
Total	185.746	399			

Significance level: 0.05

According to Table 5, the F-value is 3.141, and the p-value is 0.044, which is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This result suggests that there is a significant difference in the likelihood of repeat service usage among patients with different marital statuses.

Table 6: Likelihood of Returning to Vajira Hospital Internal Medicine Clinic Based on Educational Level

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	Sig. (p)
Between Groups	4.426	2	2.213	4.845	0.008*
Within Group	181.320	397	0.457		
Total	185.746	399			

Significance level: 0.05

In Table 6, the F-value is 4.845, and the p-value is 0.008, which is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This indicates that there is a significant difference in the likelihood of patients returning to the Internal Medicine Clinic based on their educational levels.

Table 7: Likelihood of Returning to Vajira Hospital Internal Medicine Clinic Based on Occupation

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	Sig. (p)
Between Groups	9.787	5	1.957	4.383	0.001*
Within Group	175.960	394	0.447		
Total	185.746	399			

Significance level: 0.05

In Table 7, the F-value is 4.383, with a p-value of 0.001, indicating statistical significance at the 0.05 level. This result suggests that occupation significantly affects the likelihood of patients returning to the Internal Medicine Clinic at Vajira Hospital.

Table 8: Likelihood of Returning to Vajira Hospital Internal Medicine Clinic Based on Income

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	Sig. (p)
Between Groups	8.183	6	1.364	3.019	0.007*
Within Group	177.563	393	0.452		
Total	185.746	399			

Significance level: 0.05

In Table 8, the F-value is 3.019 with a p-value of 0.007, indicating statistical significance at the 0.05 level. This result suggests that income significantly affects the likelihood of patients returning to the Internal Medicine Clinic at Vajira Hospital.

Table 9: Results of Multiple Regression Analysis of Service Quality Affecting Return Visits to Vajira Hospital Internal Medicine Clinic

Service Quality Aspect	(B)	(SE)	(Beta)	t	Sig. (p)
1. Concrete aspect of the service	0.369	0.119	0.178	3.116	0.002**
2. Reliability of the service	0.355	0.124	0.186	2.865	0.004**
3. Response to service recipients	-0.102	0.073	-0.084	-1.389	0.166
4. Giving confidence to service recipients	0.201	0.097	0.134	2.076	0.039*
5. Knowing and understanding service recipients	0.149	0.086	0.098	1.743	0.082
R	0.429				
Adjusted R^2	0.462				
F	17.808				

Significance Levels:
- *p < 0.05: Significant at the 0.05 level*
- p < 0.01: Highly significant

The results from Table 9 indicate that the quality of service has a statistically significant impact on the likelihood of patients returning to the Vajira Hospital Internal Medicine Clinic.
Significant Factors:
1. Concrete Aspect of the Service:
   o B = 0.369, p = 0.002
   o This aspect positively influences return visits, indicating that tangible elements of the service (like facilities and equipment) are important to patients.
2. Reliability of the Service:
   o B = 0.355, p = 0.004
   o Reliability is also a significant factor, emphasizing that consistent and dependable service enhances the likelihood of return.
3. Giving Confidence to Service Recipients:
   o B = 0.201, p = 0.039

- o This aspect also significantly affects return visits, suggesting that patients appreciate assurance and trust in their healthcare provider.

Non-Significant Factors:

4. Response to Service Recipients:
   - o $B = -0.102$, $p = 0.166$
   - o This variable does not significantly influence return visits, indicating that simply responding to patients may not be enough to encourage them to return.
5. Knowing and Understanding Service Recipients:
   - o $B = 0.149$, $p = 0.082$
   - o While this aspect shows a positive coefficient, it is not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), indicating it does not have a strong impact on return visits.

The study concludes that service quality factors such as the concreteness of the service, reliability, and the ability to give confidence to service recipients are crucial for encouraging patients to return to the clinic. However, the response to service recipients and understanding their needs do not significantly influence return visits, suggesting areas for potential improvement in patient engagement and service delivery.

Discussion

The study on the quality of service that affects the repeat usage of services by recipients at the Department of Internal Medicine's Internal Medicine Clinic, Faculty of Medicine, Vajira Hospital, Navamindradhiraj University, can be discussed as follows:

Results According to Study Objective 1: To compare the repeat usage of services among recipients at the Internal Medicine Clinic, the study found no differences in the likelihood of returning to use the services at Vajira Hospital's Internal Medicine Clinic among sample groups of different genders. However, significant differences were observed in age, marital status, education level, occupation, and income, which statistically influenced the decision to return for services at the clinic ($p < 0.05$). These findings suggest that working-age service recipients prioritize saving time and find it easier to utilize their treatment rights quickly, as compared to longer wait times at hospitals. This aligns with the findings of Thongthara et al (2019), which indicated significant differences in demographic characteristics—such as gender, age, occupation, education level, marital status, and the frequency of outpatient services—at the Royal Medical Department of the Grand Palace ($p < 0.05$).

Results According to Study Objective 2: The research results revealed that service quality comprises tangibility, reliability, and assurance, which significantly influence the likelihood of returning to the Vajira Hospital Internal Medicine Clinic ($p < 0.05$). Conversely, the aspects of responsiveness to service recipients and understanding of service recipients had p-values greater than 0.05, leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis (H0), indicating that these quality aspects do not significantly affect the likelihood of returning to the clinic ($p > 0.05$). This may be attributed to the perception of security that service recipients feel each time they receive care at the hospital. The Internal Medicine Department provides services on time as promised, and the personnel create a sense of safety, fostering a positive impression that encourages return visits.

This finding is consistent with Nilpat's (2018) research, which found that service quality significantly influences recipients' confidence and their likelihood to return at Paolo Rangsit Hospital. It also correlates with Malinee Pandee's (2019) study on factors influencing loyalty among nursing service recipients in inpatient wards at private hospitals, which concluded that the perception of service quality and pricing directly and indirectly influences recipients' loyalty.

Moreover, these results align with Daengkhan's (2020) study on service quality and image affecting satisfaction and the intention to reuse beauty clinics in Bangkok, revealing that service quality positively impacts users' intentions to reuse services.

However, it is noteworthy that responsiveness to service recipients and understanding of service recipients did not significantly influence the likelihood of returning to the Vajira Hospital Internal Medicine Clinic ($p > 0.05$). This may be due to specific medical conditions directly affecting patients' feelings about waiting for services. For instance, patients requiring urgent surgery might need immediate medical attention, resulting in longer wait times for less severe cases, which can lead to perceptions of inadequate responsiveness. These findings are consistent with Terntian's and **Sirimongkol** (2023) study on service quality affecting the repeat purchase intention of life insurance customers in Khon Kaen Province, which also found that responsiveness and understanding did not significantly impact customers' intentions to repurchase insurance.

Knowledge Contribution

This research has not only theoretical significance but also practical implications for the development of patient-focused service delivery approaches, particularly in creating care that meets patient needs and is in line with global trends in improving the quality of health services.
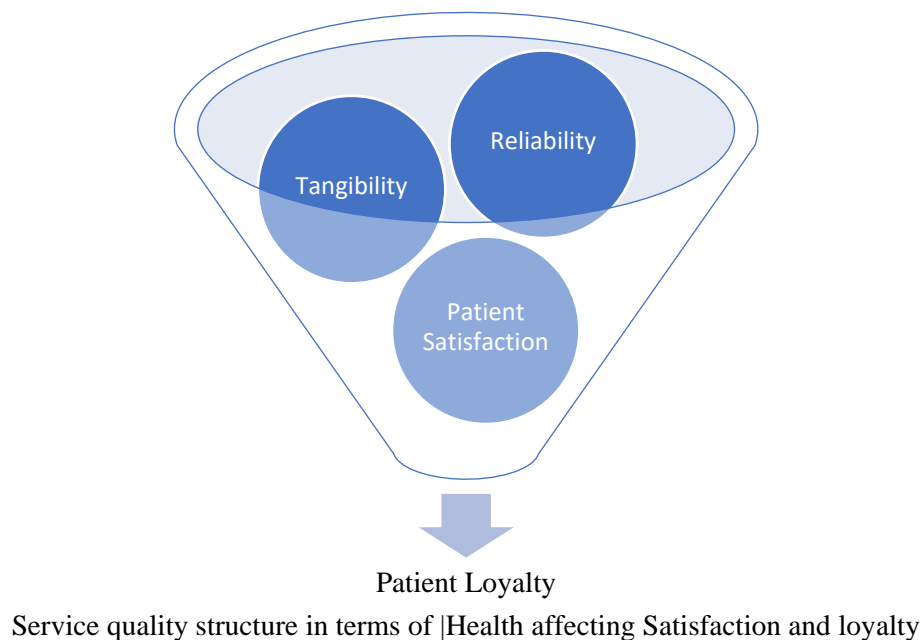

Service quality structure in terms of |Health affecting Satisfaction and loyalty

Figure 2 Knowledge Contribution

This section would benefit from a more nuanced explanation of the study's distinct contributions in the field of healthcare service quality. Expanding upon the implications of each identified service quality dimension—such as tangibility, reliability, and assurance—would provide deeper insights into how these dimensions directly impact patient loyalty and satisfaction, as well as their relevance to healthcare management. For instance, a detailed examination of why each dimension is critical, supported by recent literature or comparable studies, would illustrate the broader applicability of the findings. Additionally, integrating specific examples from the study could strengthen the argument for how these findings contribute to knowledge in both patient experience research and practical policy improvements.

Furthermore, articulating how the study's conceptual framework uniquely addresses gaps in existing research would enhance this section. Discussing how the combination of demographic factors and specific quality dimensions contributes to a novel understanding of patient behavior could clarify the study's unique knowledge contributions. It would also be beneficial to suggest how this framework could be adapted or applied to various healthcare settings beyond Vajira Hospital, thereby broadening its academic and practical significance.

A greater emphasis on the quantitative methods employed, such as multiple regression analysis, would also add value. Discussing how these methods reinforce the study's reliability and potential for replication would be beneficial. Providing a detailed rationale for choosing these methods, along with a comparison to alternative approaches used in similar studies, could underscore the rigor of the research and its contribution to methodological practices in healthcare research.

To further highlight the practical applications of these findings, discussing specific strategies for hospital administrators to implement changes based on the results, or how training programs could be designed around the identified service quality factors, would add significant value. Addressing how these contributions support a shift toward a more patient-centered care model and align with global trends in healthcare service enhancement would provide a compelling conclusion to the section.

Recommendation

Tangibility of Service: The findings indicate that the tangible aspects of service significantly influence the likelihood of returning to the Vajira Hospital Internal Medicine Clinic. Therefore, management should prioritize creating an environment that ensures service recipients feel safe and comfortable each time they receive care. This includes ensuring adequate parking facilities, providing clear signage and symbols both outside and inside the hospital, and maintaining a clean, welcoming atmosphere. Additionally, access to various departments should be convenient and straightforward, with modern tools and equipment readily available throughout the facility to enhance the overall patient experience.

Reliability of Service: Reliability is another crucial factor impacting the likelihood of return visits to the Vajira Hospital Internal Medicine Clinic. Management should focus on delivering services according to promised timelines, ensuring that treatments are standardized and error-free. Establishing clearly defined procedures for service delivery is essential, as is ensuring that the Internal Medicine Department provides a comprehensive range of services as advertised. Accuracy in the care that recipients receive must be a top priority, as this directly correlates with patient trust and satisfaction.

Building Confidence in Service Recipients: Confidence is vital for encouraging repeat visits to the Vajira Hospital Internal Medicine Clinic. To enhance this confidence, hospital executives should implement comprehensive training programs for personnel in the Internal Medicine Department that focus on fostering a sense of safety and trust among service recipients. Prioritizing honesty and transparency in all interactions with patients is crucial. Additionally, ensuring that specialists in all relevant fields are readily available and enhancing the reliability of laboratory test results will further bolster patients' confidence in the care they receive.

Suggestions for Future Research

Qualitative Studies: Future researchers should consider conducting qualitative studies, including in-depth interviews with service recipients at the Vajira Hospital Internal Medicine Clinic. This approach will provide detailed and nuanced data regarding patient experiences, helping to identify problems and barriers in service delivery. The insights gained from such qualitative research could be instrumental in driving future improvements and tailoring services to better meet patient needs.

Expanded Variables: Researchers should also expand the range of variables examined in future studies, particularly those related to satisfaction with service usage and the emotional aspects of patient experiences. Exploring these additional factors could yield valuable insights into what influences patients' decisions to return for services, potentially leading to more effective strategies for enhancing patient loyalty and satisfaction.

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