

Patient as a Medical Consumer in the Medical Industry Market in India

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Abstract

Patients are playing an ever-greater role in the health care systems of developed countries. The health care systems in these countries are evolving from a doctor–patient relationship based on paternalism and the authority of the doctor to a model based on the ethical principle of patients’ autonomy, where patients are transforming into customers, have more and better information, and want to take a more active role in making decisions that affect them.

For many years, common medical practice meant that physicians made decisions for their patients. This paternalistic view has gradually been supplanted, whereby patients and doctors share the decision-making responsibility. Only if consumers and the medical profession stand together and insist on standards that protect the doctor–patient relationship will it endure the acid raining against its delicate face. Health care administrators, whose primary responsibility is stewardship, should not ignore the need for competence, compassion, and individualization of care. Physicians' roles as patient advocates mean they must attend to the needs of individual patients who may be exceptions to the rules or otherwise have special needs yet to achieve in the Medical Industry market in India.

In a nut shell, patient as a medical consumer must have certain rights. These rights of a patient as a consumer are more important than the rights of a general consumer as it empowers medical consumers to make informed decisions about their health care that aids in the healing process. This article covers the introduction to Medical Industry market, Objectives of the study, Perceptions of patients towards health care as a consumer service, Health care providers backing medical market in India, tables showing the service characteristics, a look at the consumer driven market in health care, the legal rights of a patient as well as the relationship between the physician and patient in the Medical industry market.

Keywords: Medical Industry market, Medical consumer, fiduciary relationship, chiropractors

Introduction

“The good physician treats the disease; the great physician treats the patient who has the disease” - William Osler, the father of Modern medicine

(Source: www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/1/williamosler.html)

Health care is one of the primary needs of consumers and it is rightly regarded as the service delivery system (Parashar 1996). Health systems that run efficiently get health to where it’s needed most. The **Health Care industry**, or **Medical industry**, is an aggregation of sectors within the economic system that provides goods and services to treat patients with curative, preventive, rehabilitative, and palliative care. India has been home to many ancient civilizations and many a ways of life (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Health_care_industry). India’s health and wellness industry is poised for a spectacular takeoff with growing consumer aspiration and awareness. A good health system successfully delivers treatments and prevents disease. Establishing cost effective health care can improve population health (Chan Kevin, p.5). Consumer or Patient Orientation focuses on meeting the needs of customers in healthcare by establishing customer satisfaction standards and meeting customer expectations leading to a successful healthcare concern in today's competitive environment.

Adoption of a consumer orientation that focuses institutional attention and resources specifically on fulfilling the physical and psychological needs of the consumer, equalizing influence and control between health-care providers and consumers, and empowering consumers to make informed decisions about their health care will help promote social justice within the modern health-care system (Kreps L. Gary, 1996). In today's healthcare industry, more consumers are relying on their physicians to not only diagnose and treat medical problems, but also to provide guidance on how to make the most of their healthcare benefits (Zimmerman Scott, 2011).

Why Consumer in Hospital Different?

Kunders G.D. (1999, p.98), evaluates a big difference in waiting on a customer in a hospital and in any other organization. In the hospital, the consumer is a sick person. Hospital staff often gives the impression that they are unmindful, act unnaturally and are often confused, tensed, frightened and anxious in unfamiliar surroundings. Some are infirm, some in wheel chairs. At this time, a friendly, helpful and caring attitude, a kind word of greeting will not only be reassuring to patients, which will enhance public relations value of the hospital. The patient will immediately place his trust in the caring hands of staff and assuredly receives the warmth and welcome feeling all the way thus enabling in hospital marketing by the word of mouth by the patients.

Kunders G.D. (1999, p.82), reveals that today's market has become consumer driven and patients are better informed and know more about healthcare services. They select the best hospital and demand quality care for reasonable price. They even visit hospitals for wellness or fitness programmes or for prevention of diseases or for their treatment. When they think that they have not received the right treatment or the treatment has failed, they go to consumer protection forums for redress. In such a situation, hospitals are introducing new programmes (like advertising and outreach programmes) to enhance quality care to patient community.

Objectives of the Study

The following are the major objectives of the study:

1. To understand the role of 'Medical Consumer' in Health care
2. To evaluate the generalised perceptions of Patients towards Health care
3. To identify the Health care providers backing medical market in India
4. To evaluate the consumer driven market in Health care
5. To assess the relationship between the physician and patient in the Medical industry market

Perceptions of Patients in the Medical Industry and Health Care

In today's health care industry, more consumers are relying on their physicians not only to diagnose and treat medical problems, but also to provide guidance on how to make the most of their healthcare benefits (Zimmerman Scott, 2011). Quality of care from the patient's perspective and patient satisfaction are two major multidimensional concepts that are used several times interchangeably. Raftopoulos (2005) in her study on elderly patients focused on the following perception towards healthcare. They are as follows:

1. Food and ambience
2. Nursing care and medical care
3. Room
4. Effective treatment/diagnosis

Apart from the above, there are certain other perceptions, which comprise of providing accurate information to patients, understanding the insecurity and the fluctuating mindset of the patient in the diseased state and maintaining a good rapport with the physician.

Health Care as a Consumer Service

Health care is one of the primary needs of consumers. In developing countries like India, the responsibility of providing health care services mainly lies with the government. To fulfill the United Nations objectives, the Government of India launched in 1977, a programme, "Health for All" by 2000

A.D. The per capita investment on health even today is negligible as compared to the actual demand (Parashar Sharat, 1996). Health is a multi-dimensional and multi-causal variable. It is defined as a “state of complete physical, mental and social well-being” (World Health Organization, 1948). The health status of a community depends on its socio-economic, environmental, biological and political factors.

Health Care Providers Backing Medical Market in India

Health care providers are institutions or individuals providing health care services. Individuals including health professionals and allied health professions can be self employed or working as an employee in a hospital, clinic, or other health care institution, whether government operated, private for-profit, or private not-for-profit (eg: non-governmental organization). These include doctors, nurses, midwives, dietitians, paramedics, dentists, medical laboratory technologists, therapists, psychologists, pharmacists, chiropractors, optometric, community health workers, traditional medicine practitioners and other (World Health Organization, 2006).

Table 1-1: Characteristics of Service with Example in Healthcare

Characteristics	Example
Intangibility	Diagnosis of disease
Inseparability	Treatment of patient
Heterogeneity	Services performed by specialists
Portability	Time involved in consultation
Ownership	Provision of bed in hospital

(Source: Adapted from Parashar Sharat, 1996, p.131)

Table 1-1 shown above demonstrates the instances where:

1. The advice offered by a medical practitioner on the basis of diagnosis is an intangible service;
2. The doctor and patient come together during the treatment period, which is evident, for example, in the case of surgical operations;
3. Specialists like cardiologists, and radiologists may offer different opinion and prescribe diverse modes of treatment, which results in variations in healing efficiency and time.
4. Consultants may charge fee on the basis of time, a perishable commodity and
5. Provision of a bed in hospital is service which does not result in the transfer of ownership.

A Critical Look at the Consumer-Driven Market in Healthcare

Kunders G.D. (1999), in his book, “How to Market your hospital without Selling Your Philosophy”, pp. 82 to 83 describes the marketing strategy adopted in hospitals to attract patients. Today’s market has become more consumers driven and health care market is no exception. Patients are better informed and know more about health care services. As a matter of fact, at no time in history have people known so much about health care and medicine as they do today. Today, the patients shop for and select the best hospital; they choose their doctor or change him or her if they are not satisfied. Having become cost conscious, they demand quality care for reasonable price. Having become health conscious, more and more people go to hospitals for wellness or fitness programmes, or for prevention of diseases or for their treatment. When they think that they have not received the right treatment or the treatment has failed, they go to consumer protection forums for redress. An informed patient wants to be told about medical and surgical procedures. Hence, hospitals for their part, are introducing new programmes that need to be promoted to the public. They endeavor to enhance the quality of their services. Thus, marketing is used as a competitive weapon in hospitals, which they use it for creating extra services to patients like “Service Plus or Care Plus” that are not necessary but add to the quality of care as well as comfort and satisfaction of patients.

Rights of Patients

Dr. Bal Arun, in his online newsletter suggests certain rights of Patients. The following are the rights:

Right to considerate and respectful care

Right to information on diagnosis, treatment and medicines

Right to obtain all the relevant information about the professionals involved in the patient care

Right to expect that all the communications and records pertaining to his/her case be treated as confidential

Right to every consideration of his/her privacy concerning his/her medical care programme

Right to expect prompt treatment in an emergency

Right to refuse to participate in human experimentation, research, project affecting his/her care or treatment

Right to get copies of medical records

Right to know what hospital rules and regulations apply to him/her as a patient and the facilities obtainable to the patient

Right to get details of the bill

Right to seek second opinion about his/her disease, treatment etc

(Source: Dr. Bal Arun, "Patients Rights and Responsibilities"; Online newsletter, [www.http://acash.org/newsletter1.htm](http://acash.org/newsletter1.htm))

Why Patients Select A Hospital?

Kunders G.D. (1999), in his book, "*How to Market Your Hospital without Selling Your Philosophy*", p. 213, compares the key to patient relations in hospital is the same as customer relations in business. He considers good patient care as the key to patient relations with hospitals. This includes availability of specialists, the range of services offered, availability of the latest technology and equipment and the overall reputation of the hospital as well as personalized patient care given by courteous and dedicated staff.

In Support of Patient Rights

As per the key recommendations in the report of the High Level Expert Group on Universal Health Coverage of the Planning Commission, a health regulatory authority is formed to develop legal, financial and regulatory norms in support of patient rights. India's doctor-to-population ratio is well below the World Health Organization stipulation of one per one thousand and calls for urgent corrective intervention. The mission of a medical professional is to heal the sick and arguably to create a disease-free environment for healthy living (The Hindu, Pp.10, 2013).

Forever Relationship – The Physician and the Patient

The bonding between physician and patient adds new meaning to personalized medicine (Dr. Narang Raizada Niti, **The Hindu**, p.6, 2012). The patient-physician relationship is the cornerstone of health care service delivery (Berry L. Leonard et.al., 2008). It is the duty of the physician to figure out 'what, how and when to convey' and 'How to help fight the patient fight his own mind' to treat the patient effectively. This is true in the case of treatment of cancer.

Prof. Richards P. Edward (1993) in his online home page illustrates the physician-patient relationship as a fiduciary relationship. He clarifies that *fiduciary relationship* is a special class of legal relationships. The essence of the fiduciary relationship is that the patient's interests must be paramount. This is in contrast to the usual legal rule of *caveat emptor* ("let the buyer beware").

In most businesses, the law assumes that there is an arms'-length transaction between the buyer and the seller have, in theory, the same access to information and the same bargaining power. For example, a merchant in a retail store encourages customers to buy the items that have the greatest profitability for the store. The merchant may not lie about the goods but is allowed to puff to volunteer only favourable information and to make reasonable overstatements of the products' virtues. In contrast, the physician is expected to recommend treatments based only on the patient's medical and psychological needs.

Similarly, physicians should be familiar with fiduciary duties from the literature on informed consent to medical treatment. The fiduciary duty extends to all aspects of the physician-patient relationship. Breaching the financial aspects of the fiduciary duty to a patient can subject the physician to liability under commercial laws. The quote below is one of the many brilliant sayings of the great brain, Sir William Osler. He aptly remarks, *“One of the first duties of the physician is to educate the masses not to take medicines”*.

Be A Model Patient In The Healing Process

Natarajan Padmini (2012) in her article published in **The Hindu**, p.5, describes the role and the rules a patient should observe in the healing process. She suggests that every doctor has patients and every patient has an opinion about doctors. Very few patients think about their role in this relationship. A doctor cannot heal or manage an illness all alone. Even the most qualified doctor can do very little when the patient ignores instructions. This could also be due to physicians not explaining things properly. However, the doctor can only prescribe and it is up to the patient to cooperate, follow the advice and play a positive part in the healing process.

Conclusion

Today, India's medical infrastructure is at par with the most developed nations of the world. The patients of today have become smarter than before. There is increased awareness and people are getting more conscious about their health and lifestyle. As knowledge has become free, patients have started questioning doctors. They are more open about their ailment, which has made the approach towards treatment more collaborative. However, on the flipside, all this knowledge from the internet may leave the patient more anxious about his/her health. Quoting the words of Dr. Selvakumar Kamala, the Associate Director of GG Hospital, Chennai, remarks, *“Knowledge in the right hands is always better. The responsibility of the doctor is not only to cure the patient but also to minimize the anxiety level”*.

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