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Original Research

The effect of applying accreditation standards on quality of health services from point of view healthcare providers

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ABSTRACT:

Introduction: The National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers (NABH), an integral board of the Quality Council of India (QCI), was established to implement and manage an accreditation program for healthcare organizations. Entities such as the Quality Council of India, along with its National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers, have developed a comprehensive set of healthcare standards specifically designed for hospitals and healthcare providers. The standards set by the program are now on par with global healthcare accreditation standards and have received accreditation from the International Society for Quality Assurance in Healthcare (ISQua). The hospital accreditation standards primarily prioritize patient safety and ensure the provision of high-quality services, considering the dynamic nature of the healthcare landscape. **Aim:** The aim of this study was to analyze the impact of applying accreditation standards on the quality of health services from the perspective of healthcare providers. **Methods:** This study followed a cross-sectional design, employing a descriptive approach and utilizing a simple random sampling methodology. The primary data was collected from hospital staff for a time span of 45 days from 600 participants of which 545 valid responses were considered. The validated questionnaire, consisting of 20 items, was given to 600 quality team members through Google Forms. It aimed to evaluate the healthcare providers perceptions regarding patient safety, culture, and quality of care. **Results:** Out of the 545 valid participants, the majority of responses were provided by administrators, accounting for 53.29% of the total participants. In this study, participants' perceptions regarding the effect of hospital accreditation and patient safety were evaluated. Statistical analysis revealed that a significantly higher number of participants had a favorable response ($p < 0.001$) for all 20 items. **Conclusion:** The findings of this study indicate a positive relationship between accreditation and the quality of healthcare. It is important to develop strategies that reinforce how accreditation can lead to improved patient satisfaction, patient safety, cost-effectiveness, and reputation.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, there have been numerous remarkable advancements in both medicine and technology. However, despite these remarkable progressions, the healthcare system still falls short in adequately ensuring patient safety and effectively addressing the diverse needs of patients. ^(1,2) According to the World Health Organization (WHO), national health systems in both developed and developing countries are increasingly focused on

meeting patients' expectations, ensuring their safety, and improving the overall quality of care. Market forces such as medical tourism, insurance, corporate growth, and competition have contributed to the growing demand for high-quality healthcare services. However, achieving a high standard in healthcare is a complex journey, and failing to meet these standards puts patients at risk. WHO research has shown that the Southeast Asian region has a hospital infection incidence of 10%, while the Eastern Mediterranean

region has the highest incidence at 11.8%. Different countries have adopted unique approaches and learned from their experiences to enhance the quality of healthcare. Wealthy industrialized nations have made significant progress in this regard, while developing countries are still working towards implementing effective strategies to ensure quality healthcare. With rising consumer expectations for top-notch care, national and international accreditation bodies have been introduced as mechanisms for quality assurance, thereby improving access to superior healthcare services. ⁽³⁻⁵⁾

HOSPITAL ACCREDITATION

The National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers (NABH), an integral board of the Quality Council of India (QCI), was established to implement and manage an accreditation program for healthcare organizations. Its inception dates to 2005, and it serves as the primary accreditation body for hospitals across India. Entities such as the Quality Council of India, along with its National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers, have developed a comprehensive set of healthcare standards specifically designed for hospitals and healthcare providers. These standards encompass an extensive range of over 600 parameters, which are categorized into two main areas: patient-centered standards and organization-centered standards. ⁽⁶⁾ To meet the requirements of these standard elements, hospitals must adopt a systematic approach in every facet of their operations. This includes implementing well-defined processes throughout various stages, such as registration, admission, pre-surgery, peri-surgery, post-surgery protocols, as well as discharge procedures and post-discharge follow-up. It is crucial for hospitals to ensure that not only clinical aspects but also governance aspects are guided by clear and transparent policies and protocols. The primary objective of NABH is to streamline and optimize the overall functioning of a hospital. The NABH definition of accreditation is “a public recognition by a national or international healthcare accreditation body, of the achievement of accreditation standards by a healthcare organization, demonstrated through an independent external peer assessment of that organization’s level of performance in relation to the standards.” Hospital accreditation has also been defined as “a self-assessment and external peer assessment process used by healthcare organizations to accurately assess their level of performance, in relation to the established standards and to implement ways to continuously improve.” ⁽⁸⁻⁹⁾ Initially launched with the aim of enhancing healthcare quality and patient safety in both public and private hospitals, this program has steadily evolved and gained international recognition. The standards set by the program are now on par with global healthcare accreditation standards and have received accreditation from the International

Society for Quality Assurance in Healthcare (ISQua). The hospital accreditation standards primarily prioritize patient safety and ensure the provision of high-quality services, considering the dynamic nature of the healthcare landscape.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

This study followed a cross-sectional design, employing a descriptive approach and utilizing a simple random sampling methodology. The primary data was collected from hospital staff located in different states and union territories of India. The study spanned a duration of 45 days. Informed consent was obtained through participation in the survey, and a questionnaire based on previous studies and the specific objectives of this study was utilized. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, indicating high reliability with a value of 0.910 for the Likert scale. The validated questionnaire, consisting of 20 items, was administered to 600 quality team members through Google Forms. It aimed to evaluate the respondents' perceptions regarding patient safety, culture, and quality of care. The responses were recorded on a 5-point scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. For analysis purposes, strongly agree and agree were considered positive responses, while neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree were classified as negative responses. A total of 545 valid responses were obtained, resulting in a response rate of 90.83%. The survey encompassed various parameters such as patient education, patient satisfaction, documentation by healthcare professionals, reporting methods, emergency preparedness, facility management, equipment management, waiting periods, and patient rights. These parameters were chosen to assess the impact of accreditation on doctors, nurses, and administrators, focusing on quality and safety aspects within the hospital.

RESULTS

Out of the 545 valid participants, the majority of responses were provided by administrators, accounting for 53.29% of the total participants. In this study, participants' perceptions regarding the impact of hospital accreditation and patient safety were evaluated (Table 1). Statistical analysis revealed that a significantly higher number of participants had a favorable response ($p < 0.001$) for all 20 items. Notably, 515 participants (85.83%) acknowledged that accreditation resulted in an overall improvement in the quality of healthcare services. These findings indicate a significant association between staff perception of hospital accreditation, quality of care, and patient safety. Further analysis of individual groups revealed that variables such as waiting time improvement, patient rights, medical documentation, nursing documentation, and staff accountability received a considerable positive response rate of 45%

or above compared to other variables. Among administrators, variables such as patient satisfaction, infection control practices, facility maintenance, compliance with occupational health regulations, and statutory regulations showed a positive response rate across the variable pool.

Table 1: Overview of participants on effect of accreditation.

Factors	Positive (%)	Negative (%)
Medical documentation by clinicians	84.5	15.5
Roles and responsibilities of healthcare providers	85	15
Accountability of staff	84.3	15.7
Doctor's awareness on clinical policies	83.3	16.7
Nurse's awareness on nursing policies	83.6	16.4
Patient education	86	14
Patient satisfaction	86	14
Patient's respects and rights	82.5	17.5
Control practices of infection	82.8	17.2
Segregation of biomedical waste	84.5	15.5
Lab functioning	87	13
Staff knowledge and adherence to regulations regarding occupational health risks	84.5	15.5
Coordination between departments	82.2	17.8
General quality of care	84.4	15.6
Adherence to government norms and legal regulations	84.8	15.2
Enhancement of safety measures	83.7	16.3
Staff perception and enhancement	83.9	16.1
Staff knowledge and recognition of reporting safety incidents	83	17
Staff engagement and job satisfaction	85.5	14.5
Hygiene and cleanliness standards.	84	16

DISCUSSION

In the present study, it was observed that the implementation of accreditation in hospitals resulted in several benefits across various aspects of healthcare quality. Notably, the introduction of accreditation had the potential to enhance patient satisfaction. These findings are consistent with a previous investigation conducted by Paccioni et al. (2008), which also demonstrated that the implementation of accreditation programs was associated with improved customer satisfaction, particularly in addressing user complaints. ^(9,10) Within this study, nurses reported perceiving a positive impact on the quality of care following the implementation of accreditation. The findings suggest that accreditation has led to an improvement in the perceived quality of care within the sampled hospitals, with notable variations observed based on hospital size. Specifically, significant differences were noted across hospital size categories, with small- and medium-sized hospitals exhibiting better outcomes in all scales and subscales, except for the Leadership, Commitment, and Support subscale. ⁽¹¹⁾ The healthcare industry holds significant importance within the service sector, given its intricate nature and involvement of multiple stakeholders. Weheba emphasizes the complexity of healthcare quality in this context ⁽¹²⁾.

The shift from a physician-centered approach to a patient-centered approach in the healthcare industry has led to an increased emphasis on the demand for high-quality healthcare services. Consequently, quality assurance mechanisms have become more

stringent, and there is a growing pursuit of accreditation. Accreditation plays a vital role in ensuring technical competence within healthcare organizations by establishing and upholding specific healthcare service standards. In the Indian context, the growth of hospital accreditation is influenced by various factors. These include external pressure from organizations on which accreditation relies and cultural expectations within the region where the organization operates. Therefore, the present study aimed to assess the impact and awareness of hospital accreditation among doctors, nurses, and administrators, particularly among quality team members. Notably, a significant proportion of responses were obtained from administrators, accounting for 53.29% of the total participants. The findings of our study consistently demonstrate a positive association between accreditation and various process-related performance measures, safety culture, hospital efficiency, and patient length of stay. However, a notable negative impact was observed on staff job stress. The effects on mortality and healthcare-associated infection outcomes were inconclusive due to heterogeneity in the results. Interestingly, there was no significant relationship found between accreditation and staff job satisfaction, patient satisfaction and experience, or 30-day readmission rate. It is important to acknowledge that these conclusions may be influenced by the diversity in accreditation schemes, the presence of extrinsic confounders, and the varying characteristics of the hospitals included in the study ^(13,14).

While culture is often cited as a reason for accreditation failure, our review aligns with previous studies in demonstrating a positive effect of accreditation on safety culture at the organizational level ⁽¹⁵⁻¹⁷⁾. However, at the individual level, accreditation was associated with increased stress levels among healthcare professionals ⁽¹⁸⁻²¹⁾. This suggests the need to strike a balance between the risks and benefits of accreditation to foster acceptance and active engagement from healthcare practitioners throughout the accreditation process. It is crucial to address these negative consequences through awareness campaigns, leadership support, and the improvement of accreditation standards and processes. Taking these remedial measures into consideration can help mitigate the adverse effects and optimize the overall impact of accreditation in healthcare settings ⁽²²⁻²⁴⁾.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate a positive relationship between accreditation and the quality of healthcare. It is important to develop strategies that reinforce how accreditation can lead to improved patient satisfaction, patient safety, cost-effectiveness, and reputation. Additionally, it is crucial to understand how accreditation can strengthen leadership, culture, and climate within healthcare organizations, and how these factors can mediate accreditation performance. Nurses working in accredited hospitals reported a higher level of perceived quality in health services. The perception of patient safety culture among nurses is influenced by nursing management, commitment to quality planning, education, and training. Nurse managers play a vital role as healthcare providers and key decision-makers in hospitals, continuously increasing awareness and enhancing the quality and safety of patient care. Sustaining accreditation remains a priority for healthcare providers and the organization. Therefore, healthcare providers should empower staff members to develop quality improvement projects and encourage their active participation in decision-making processes related to the delivery of safe care. The accreditation program offers numerous benefits to hospitals, patients, and staff members, including satisfaction, professional development, monetary rewards, prestige, and recognition. It signifies a globally competitive workforce and contributes to improving the quality of care and services provided by hospitals.

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