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DIPSTICK SURVEY AT ANSAR MALL TO ASSESS THE MARKET FOR UPCOMING GMC HOSPITAL IN DUBAI

Nida Siddique
Student, IIHMR University

Dr. Vinod Kumar SV
Professor, IIHMR University

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INTRODUCTION

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, including Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, are poised to encounter substantial challenges in the healthcare sector over the next decade. These challenges will necessitate innovative strategies from both governmental and private healthcare entities. A transformative shift in healthcare demand is underway in the GCC region. Anticipated is an unparalleled surge in healthcare demand over the next two decades, posing unprecedented challenges. It is projected that total healthcare expenditure in the region will escalate to US$60 billion by 2025, a significant increase from the current US$12 billion. This surge in demand is distinctive, as it involves the simultaneous requirement to restructure healthcare systems to address lifestyle-related health issues. Despite notable improvements in GCC healthcare systems over the past two decades, there persists a level of dissatisfaction among residents regarding the accessibility and quality of care provided at government-run hospitals and clinics.

Government entities often lack the necessary managerial expertise to effectively manage healthcare facilities, and monetary incentives alone have proven insufficient to attract specialists required to address the increasing cases of ailments like heart disease and cancer. The government-operated hospitals and clinics are unprepared for the challenges posed by a rapidly growing and aging population, as well as the surge in chronic diseases such as diabetes, which has become more prevalent with the development of countries. In an effort to enhance services and elevate care standards, some Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) governments have already incentivized globally recognized academic institutions to establish healthcare facilities within their nations.

A greater number of private healthcare providers are needed to meet the anticipated future demand. Primarily, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) governments plan to continue subsidizing comprehensive medical benefits, particularly for their citizens. Presently, governments bear over 75 percent of this financial burden, but even those with substantial resources may find it insufficient to cover the escalating healthcare costs in the next 20 years. Consequently, there is a growing recognition that private sector involvement will be essential to finance healthcare [3,4].

The healthcare sector has undergone substantial changes over time, marked by shifts in insurance policies, costs, and reimbursement methods. Large corporate hospital-management firms have emerged, and ongoing innovations continually transform the dynamics of receiving and delivering medical care in numerous ways. Concurrently, the economy has experienced contractions in recent years. Medical practitioners are realizing that medical practices are not immune to economic downturns. Additionally, the field of medicine has become more competitive, leading patients to seek less care, either due to inadequate insurance coverage or the inability to afford deductibles [2].

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What degree of awareness and contentment exists regarding the services provided by Gulf Medical College Hospitals among individuals in the Ansar Mall area of Al Quasais in Dubai?
2. What was the prevailing 'Pattern of Hospital Service Utilization' concerning the information source for medical treatment, fees paid for specialist consultations, and the selection of a medical facility in emergency situations among individuals at Ansar Mall in the Al Quasais area of Dubai?
3. What were the preferences regarding the language and nationality of the attending doctor among individuals in the Ansar Mall area of Al Quasais in Dubai?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the extent of awareness and satisfaction regarding the services provided by Gulf Medical College Hospitals among the population in the Ansar Mall area of Al Qusais in Dubai.
2. To examine the prevailing 'Pattern of Hospital Service Utilization,'

including the information sources for medical treatment, fees paid for specialist consultations, and the selection of a medical facility in emergency situations among individuals at Ansar Mall in the Al Qusais area of Dubai.

3. To investigate the preferences for the language and nationality of the attending doctor among individuals in the Ansar Mall area of Al Qusais in Dubai.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This cross-sectional dipstick study focuses on the public at Ansar Mall in Sharjah, located in the Al Qusais area of Dubai, known for its substantial daily footfall of around 1500 customers, attracting a diverse mix of nationalities. The study employed a semi-structured questionnaire as the study tool, that aimed to gather information on various aspects from this multicultural population. The calculated sample size of 487 was determined using the formula $n = t^2 \times p(1-p) / m^2$, with a confidence level of 95% (t=1.96), estimated prevalence of 50% (p=0.5), and a margin of error of 5% (m=0.05). Considering a 10% non-response rate, the sample size was increased to 424 as per the hospital's management decision, optimizing resources and time constraints for a comprehensive representation of the mall's diverse visitor demographic.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The age distribution of the interviewed respondents of Ansar Mall. 34 percent of the respondents were in the age group of 31-40 years of age. Most of the responses, i.e. 82 percent, were in the age range of 25-50 years of age group. The distribution of responses in age group also correlates with the current demographic transition pyramid of UAE. The wide width in the middle of demographic transition pyramid also provided the hospital an opportunity to target the young and middle-aged group for marketing the new hospital in Dubai. More than fifty percent of the interviewed respondents were males. 45 percent of female responses also correlated to the UAE’s male dominated demographic profile. The lower female responses were also attributed to the conservative culture of the UAE’s society.

The respondents were asked about the awareness of GMC Hospital. The analysis at the end of the survey revealed that approximately 64 percent of the respondents were aware of the GMC hospitals. The awareness was more in respect to GMC hospital at Ajman. Most of the respondents (71%) did not experience any service from GMC Hospitals. Out of the remaining 29% of experienced respondents 21% were found to be satisfied with the GMC hospital services. A very small proportion of around 2 percent was found to be not satisfied. Around 42 percent of the respondents knew about the opening of GMC in Dubai. The remaining 58 percent unaware respondents also open a window of opportunity for the hospital to propose marketing strategies for their awareness. majority of the respondents (60 %) pay less than 200 AED for a specialist consultation. The reason attributed to this is that ninety percent of the people in UAE are insured and they pay only a small amount of copayment which is usually between the ranges of 30-40 AED. Most of the responses (28%) said that they pay in the range of 200-250 AED for the consultation by a specialist. The same findings were also correlated with a price study done at Beloul hospital, NMC Hospital and Zulekha hospital.

CONCLUSION

The first thing that becomes clear from this exercise was that Gulf Medical College Hospitals was a known brand in Dubai. But awareness needs to be generated among the masses regarding its latest venture, that was, upcoming Gulf Medical College Hospital in Al Quasais area of Dubai.

Secondly, the consultation charges that people were paying currently for a specialist in Dubai were in the range of 200-250 AED. We needed to further corroborate this finding by doing a 'Price Study' of hospitals in Dubai. This would lead us to set competitive prices for our services at GMC Hospital Dubai.

Thirdly, it was concluded that Indian Doctors who communicate with patients in English were most preferred by our prospective patients. Knowledge of Hindi, Arabic or Malayalam would be an added advantage.

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