Assessment of Service Quality within the Healthcare Industry

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Abstract—**Today, the quality of perceived products and services is a competitive factor from the customers' viewpoint. Recognizing customers' perceptions and expectations is the first step in quality improvement. Accordingly, the current study is an attempt to measure service quality based upon the patients' perceptions and expectations. It aims to determine the problem of primary health services provided in the health centers using service recipients' perceptions and expectations. In this study, we observed a negative gap in all quality dimensions. Overall quality gap was -0.63 and the highest level of quality gap was in the reliability (-0.78) and the lowest level of quality gap was in the empathy (-0.25). There was no significant relationship between the patients' age and education, and quality gap (p>0.05). The most critical issues facing hospital were their own physicians and hospital staffs' the reliability dimension was rated as the most important service, provide high quality service and get patients' trust and confidence and their sufficient humility and professional expertise. The results showed that there was a gap between the current situation and the desired state of healthcare quality, which could be reduced with proper planning, management and training. Physicians are suggested to fully explain the disease conditions to patients. Health care workers have to consider ethical codes and they should be equipped with the latest knowledge.**

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, health care has become a very important issue coupled with increased concern about medical errors, patient safety and increased medical costs (1). In the world, one of the growing industries in the hospital service sector is the health care industry which has its own special place among a variety of service organizations because, first, this sector is connected with all individuals and social groups; second and more importantly, it is responsible for treatment, care and keeping society's health. Accordingly, improving the health care service quality is at the center of current health care industry (2, 3). Medical institute has defined health care quality as follows: "the degree of offering services that increases the possibility of achieving the determined objectives"(4). Sometime, specialists may focus on only one group and forget about other groups in the improvement of service quality. This can lead to a kind of error in the research (5). However, despite the importance of this sector, in many cases service delivery is so that people are dissatisfied. Due to the critical role of such organizations, even small errors may lead to great and irreparable damages (6). Controlling and assessing the quality of health care services are the first necessary steps to provide proper service; thus, hospitals as the most significant medical organizations in different countries and societies need to be assessed (7) Service quality is known as the determinant factor of organizations' success in today competitive environment. Any decrease in customer satisfaction due to service is of concern (6). Traditional approaches defined characteristics of the good or service as a measure to evaluate the quality, but, according to the new approaches