

CHAPTER 2
ESSAY ON IMPROVEMENT OF HEALTH CARE
SERVICES IN JDW NATIONAL REFERRAL
HOSPITAL

2.1 INTRODUCTION

JDW National Referral Hospital (JDWNRH) is situated in Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan. It is the largest hospital in terms of infrastructure and facilities in the country. It serves both as the teaching hospital for the Royal Institute of Health Services (RIHS) and the main referral center for the patients from other hospitals and basic health units located in various parts of the country. This hospital provides health care services totally free of charge. Not even the registration fees are levied on the patients. The in-patients are provided with free meals along with free treatment during their stay in the hospital. In addition to the OPD services, which is the main focus of this study, there are approximately 200 in-patient beds, 492 employees, and 28 different sections, to ensure good health care services in the hospital.

The out patient department (OPD) has 10 different sections, a laboratory, x-ray facilities, a dental unit, an emergency room, 2 pharmacies, 23 doctors

(including the specialists and the general duty medical officers), 10 nurses, 30 technicians, 3 receptionists, and 3 record keepers with computer services. It operates five and half (Saturday) days a week from 9AM to 3PM and the emergency section provides 24 hour services for serious cases. In 1995 there were 169097 OPD patients which varied from 10770 cases per month in January to 17081 cases per month in July of the same year. The over a week variation ranges from 1180 cases on Mondays to 850 cases on Fridays (see Appendix C). A preliminary analysis, based on my perception and experience as an administrator suggest that, because of their duties in teaching the health school students, ward rounds in the morning, and administrative responsibilities often the staff reach the OPD later than 9 AM causing shortage of staff. In addition some staff have to rotate to do emergency duties, and therefore, fewer staff are available for the OPD services. This is based on the perception and experience of the researcher as the hospital administrator in JDW National Referral Hospital.

2.2 Problem identification and analysis:

While attempting to analyze the issue of waiting time it may be important to identify the nature of the issue in terms of whose perception is it, how is this issue related to other issues in the system, what might happen if the issue is not resolved or how this

issue affects improvement or development in the organization. To begin with the mission of the hospital itself may be one of the contribution factors to this issue.

The mission of the hospital is to provide good quality health care services free of charge. Who does not want good services which is free of charge? There may be patients who come to hospital even for very minor problems just to pass their time or escape their works. From my own experience as a physician I faced situations where the patient refused to leave the hospital on discharge. It is because the hospital provides free food and treatment and the patient wants to relax in the hospital rather than at home. So, considering all these situations, it might be important to review the mission of the hospital and find the relation of its policies to the issue of waiting time.

According to Jonathan, Rikich, and Kurt (1992), there are four main areas which directly or indirectly contribute to the problems in the hospital. These are, (1) manpower, (2) management, (3) technology, (4) infrastructure. In case of JDW National Referral Hospital all of these factors might be contributing to the issue of waiting time. Therefore, it may be wise to analyze these four factors and find their relationships with the issue of waiting time in the OPD of JDW National Referral Hospital. This

preliminary analysis is based mostly on my own perception and experience as the administrator in this hospital.

There is shortage of trained manpower in all the categories, such as, doctors, nurses, and technicians in the hospital. From the OPD statistics (refer Appendix C), it is evident that the number of patients attending the OPD is increasing every year but the number of service providers or health care staff is not increasing proportionately. This situation could lead to long waiting time to get health care services. Similarly the quality of manpower in terms of capability, competency, knowledge and skill, behavior and attitude, motivation etc. may contribute to the issue of waiting time. In this study it is proposed to analyze these factors and identify ways to improve the services in the OPD.

Management may play an important role in the issue of waiting time. The health care delivery system in the OPD which consists of hierarchy system, job responsibilities, rules and regulations, policy and planning, monitoring and supervision, leadership and motivation etc. may have to be considered very carefully because these factors might be affecting the issue of waiting time in the OPD.

For example, motivation of the staff may be important to solve the issue of waiting time rather

than the supervision or rules and regulations alone. It might be important to have a good management system but it is difficult to define what a good management system is and where to find it. From my own experience JDW National Referral Hospital lacks management capacity and it is in the process of development. So, this situation may be contributing to the issue of waiting time and further in-depth analysis might help the hospital management to solve this issue.

The technology might be one of the key factors affecting this issue. With the rapid change in the health care technology JDW National Referral Hospital is facing great difficulty to cope up with the changes. From my own experience as an administrator in this hospital, the main issues relating to technology are, lack of capability to decide which technology is most suitable for the country, lack of knowledge on cost effectiveness, lack of trained personnel to use the technologies, and lack of resources to purchase the needed technologies.

Although the technology may help to reduce the waiting time, in some cases it may be the cause of long waiting time. For example, an untrained or inefficient computer operator may cause delay in the registration section leading to long waiting time. Similarly, an old or defective x-ray or laboratory equipment may cause delay in service.

Lack of maintenance, over use of the equipment and misuse of the technology may be important factors contributing to delayed service causing long waiting time for the patients. Since service is free of charge the demand for the technology related services may be higher. Probably every injury or accident cases may ask for an x-ray diagnosis, and most of the pregnant cases may ask for an ultrasound. Such situations may be contributing to this issue of long waiting time to get technology related health care services. Therefore, it might be important to consider all these factors in the analysis of long waiting time in the OPD.

The infrastructure of the hospital may be equally important as contributing factors to the issue of long waiting time in the OPD. The comfort of the waiting area in terms of space, cleanliness, seating, audiovisuals, the temperature of the area, etc. might affect the perception of waiting time by the patients or attendants. For example, the perception of waiting time is different when a person waits in the airport or in the train station. The comfort of the waiting area thus play an important role. It might be important to observe these factors in its natural settings and relate to the issue of waiting time in order to obtain a realistic view of the issue. In case of JDW National Referral Hospital, based on my own observation the waiting area is small, crowded, noisy, with inadequate seats for the patients. could

this situation be contributing to the issue of waiting time?. Due to lack of adequate chambers for the doctors, two or three doctors sit in the same chamber leading to a huge crowd at the entrance. It may be important to consider all these factors in the analysis of long waiting time. In this proposed study I would like to find out the relationship between the infrastructure of OPD and the issue of long waiting time.

According to Ware, Synder, and Chu (1983) it was highlighted that waiting time is a perception which is related to the patient satisfaction with the services and quality of health care services delivered by the organization. Since it is not possible for me to study all the factors I would like to concentrate on the relationship between patient satisfaction and the waiting time in this proposed study. But, it does not mean that the quality aspect of the service is totally omitted. While discussing the satisfaction level with the health care services the issue of quality of services directly or indirectly considered because quality of health care services may affect the satisfaction level of patients.

According to the above authors the satisfaction may be with the outcome of the treatment, expectation of the patient, relationship between the health care providers and the patients, and cost effectiveness which is closely related to the quality of services.

In the context of JDW National Referral Hospital from the patient point of view cost effectiveness is not relevant as the services are provided free of charge. But, it might be important to find the level of satisfaction of the patients with the services, their behavior and attitude towards the services, and their perception of problems in the OPD. Long waiting time is an interpretation of patients' dissatisfaction with the health care services (Seamus and Micheal 1991). It may be possible that the patient is not happy or satisfied with the health care services and it is perceived as long waiting time, or it may be simply a comparison with the services such as bank, insurance or post office etc.

The issue of waiting time cannot be analyzed in isolation. It may be related to the overall system of the hospital which is a sub set of the entire health care system in the country. The system of the hospital, socio-cultural system, economic status, individual identity of the patients and service providers might need adequate attention in order to analyze this issue holistically. The perspective of the stakeholders may be important in the analysis of the problem. According to Blair and Whitehead (1988), the stakeholders have their expectations and support for the hospitals and its managers. The perceptions of the problems may not be the same for the service providers and the other stakeholders. So, it might be

important to find out their perception of the related issue and their involvement in the problem solving process. Otherwise it may happen that the hospital management considers its service as best but on the other hand the patients are totally dissatisfied with the services provided by the hospital. James (1987) stated that, a service that appears to be of high quality by clinical, economic, and other provider orientated criteria is far from ideal if the patient is dissatisfied. This state of dissatisfaction may be expressed as long waiting time. Therefore, proper analysis of the stakeholders in terms of their behavior, attitude, perception of the problem might be helpful for analysis of the issue of waiting time.

The socio-cultural aspect of the country may contribute to the issue of perception of waiting time. In Bhutan, based on my own knowledge and experience, people are normally not use to queue system for services. They may try to escape the queue as much as possible in order to get fast service. The influence of the staff, relatives and friends are sought where are possible. It is usual practice to consult traditional healers or religious personnel before coming to the hospital. In most cases the patients are accompanied by one or two attendants which adds to the crowd in the OPD. All these situations are quite unique and may be important to be considered in the analysis of waiting time. For example, it may happen that the perception of seriousness of a case may not

be the same for traditional healers and the hospital staff. All these situations may affect the perception of waiting time. The other factors like distance from the hospital, convenience of travel, family and personal problems, climatic conditions etc. might have an effect on the perception of waiting time and the satisfaction level of the patients which needs to be considered in the problem analysis.

The waiting time may not be an issue by itself. It may be possible that the real issue is something else which the patient perceive or complain as long waiting time. For example, the rude behavior of the staff, uncomfortable waiting area, complicated service system etc. may create a situation which may be perceived as an issue of waiting time. Therefore, the issue of waiting time might need a wider view than just merely assuming that it is the time taken by the patients to avail health care services in the OPD. Because of all these reasons, it may be difficult to set up standards or accurate measurements for the issue of waiting time. By the quantitative analysis the behavioral and the perception part of the issue might be missed. This may lead to an incomplete analysis of the issue and the solution thus obtained may not be applicable, practical and realistic. Such a situation may only cause unnecessary wastage of resources while the problem still remains as it was.

2.3 Conclusion.

It is evident that waiting time is not an issue by itself, rather it is a cause or consequence of many other issues in the OPD. It is a complex issue involving many other factors, such as, patient satisfaction, quality of services, behavior and attitude of the stakeholders, the system of the organization, etc. In order to analyze this issue it might be important to consider all these factors. Only measuring the total time taken to get the health care services in the hospital may not indicate anything in terms of the analysis of the issue of waiting time. There is a need to study this issue of waiting time in order to find a realistic and practical solution to the problem.

Therefore, a study has been proposed as an action research to identify the strategic issues or critical factors relating to the waiting time. These factors may be used in the process of problem solving in order to improve health care services in the OPD of JDW national referral hospital.