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## **Quality of health services in Jordanian government hospitals Reality and challenges**

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### **Abstract**

As a result of the developments in health, treatment and medical services and the need to provide medical services to patients in all disciplines with good quality has increased. The health sector in Jordan has been distinguished over the past decades by providing high quality and efficient health services that have made the health services sector distinct regionally and made Jordan recognized on the Arab and regional level of progress in the medical sector. However, the public health sector in Jordan is declining significantly and most of the existing solutions have not worked. The current study aimed to study the quality of health services in Jordanian government hospitals and determine their reality and the most prominent challenges facing them. To achieve the objectives of the research, the researcher relied on the descriptive approach by looking at the previous studies and researches related to the research topic. The results found that government hospitals and medical centers in Jordan suffer from chronic problems in their services,

including; overcrowded clinics, ambulance and emergency departments, shortage of doctors and nurses, lack of medical number relative to the number of reviewers,

conflicting medical diagnoses from one doctor to another in the same hospital, leading to a high rate of medical errors, lack of cleanliness and unpleasant odors.

**Keywords:** *Quality of health services, Jordanian government hospitals, challenges*

## 1. Introduction

Modern societies provide great importance to the quality of health services because of their relevance to human health and life. This interest crystallized the establishment of health service institutions in various communities to provide health services to them when they need it. Researchers in this field have also sought to identify the dimensions of health service quality, which serve as indicators for measuring the quality of health service. This interest seeks to improve the level of health services in all health institutions of various types, to raise awareness of the right practice, to provide the best services and obtain patient satisfaction and achieve the goals, policies and general plans for development (Alhunaiti, 2017).

As a result of the developments in health, treatment and medical services and the need to provide medical services to patients in all disciplines with good quality has increased. (Essiam, 2013).

Therefore, the Jordanian governments hospitals seek to provide medical services with high quality that satisfy the patients, as the increasing of their numbers emphasizes the importance of providing high quality medical services (Ministry of Health, Annual Report, 2008).

The health sector in the Kingdom is considered one of the most vital and important sectors in terms of humanitarian, service and economic. This sector is also one of the largest sectors that provide services, including health services. These services are provided through the Ministry of Health and Royal Medical Services and university hospitals and the private sector. Economically the health sector is one of the most important tributaries of the Jordanian economy (Rawashdeh, 2018). The health sector in Jordan has been distinguished over the past decades by providing high quality and efficient health services that have made the health services sector distinct regionally and made Jordan recognized on the Arab and regional level of progress in the medical sector. However, the public health sector in Jordan is declining significantly and most of the existing solutions have not worked.

Several challenges facing the entire health sector are still looking for solutions to end a crisis. These challenges, which have a negative impact on the public health sector, especially those related to patients, are highlighted by the lack of specialist doctors in many health sites of the Ministry of Health. The current study aims to study the quality of health services in Jordanian government hospitals and determine their reality and the most prominent challenges facing them.

### 1.1 Research problem

Health sector is one of the most important service sectors in any country because it deals with human life death or survival in good health. Developing this sector for high quality medical services is therefore a strategic objective for any country. Measuring the quality of services is also one of the main approaches to improving the quality of service organizations (Al Rawashdeh and Al Smadi, 2010). However, there is a difference in determining how the quality of service is measured and the factors, challenges and its associated variables, especially in the field of health work. According to that, there is a need for government hospitals to deal with the concept of quality and attention in providing services to their customers.

The current research problem is highlighted by the low level of health services provided to patients in Jordanian government hospitals, which leads to either the lack of access to quality health care at the appropriate time, place and time, or to the reluctance of many patients to receive treatment inside Jordan and travel abroad for treatment which will costs extra effort. Thus, the current research seeks to study the quality of health services in Jordanian government hospitals, especially by clarifying its reality and challenges. Therefore, the current research problem can be summarized in the following question: **What is the reality of the health services quality in government hospitals in Jordan? And what challenges do these hospitals face?**

## **1.2 Research importance**

The quality of health service has become one of the main topics in the marketing of health care services. These multiple parties focus on the quality of health service to achieve its goals and interests, as the imbalance and errors in the quality of health care is unacceptable and its effects extend beyond physical damage to physical and psychological damage. Al Rawashdeh and Al Smadi (2010) argued that quality management helps health managers apply systematic methods to identify problems and develop solutions. Quality managers must developing, selecting and validating standards or criteria for improving the quality of health service. This requires managers to pay attention to the quality of service to patients, although quality when providing service to the patient is essential for anyone who provides it. Ghose & Adhish (2011) added that focusing on multiple dimensions of quality can help managers to determine managerial priorities for efficiency and technical capability

The quality of medical services has received great attention from individuals and health institutions alike in terms of studies and clarification of concepts and all theoretical aspects of this topic. The importance of this study shown from its aim to identify the concept of quality of medical services, to realize the dimensions used in the provision of medical services, and to identify the challenges facing the provision of an acceptable level of quality in Jordanian

government hospitals. Moreover, given the limited research in this field in Jordan in particular (at least within the limits of the researcher's knowledge), this study came to discuss the issue of the quality of medical services in government hospitals and identify their challenges and prospects.

### **1.3 Research methodology**

To achieve the objectives of the research, the researcher will rely on the descriptive approach by looking at the previous studies and researches related to the research topic.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Quality of health services**

Service in general means any act or performance that may be provided by a party to another party whose substance is intangible and does not result in any ownership and productivity. Different tools, devices and equipment can be used to provide service to the patient and then heal which may take a short or long time

The quality of health service is defined as the provision of health services that are safer, more accessible, more compelling to their providers and more satisfactory to their beneficiaries, so that a positive view of the health care provided in the community is generated (Ghose & Adhish, 2011). Musleh (2009) emphasized that the quality of health service includes the application of medical science and technology to maximize public health, without increasing exposure to risk. Therefore,

the essence of quality is to meet the needs of customers in the health services provided to them, which must be compatible with the pre-use desired by customers through continuous research and improvement of these services.

### **2.1.1 Components and dimensions of health services quality**

There are simple principles by which the quality of medical services can be judged, some can be measured objectively and others remain subject to personal views. Irfan et al. (2012) referred to a set of these principles that include; differences in medical practice, level of medical errors, duration of patient waiting, and patient attitudes towards health service. Mosadeghrad (2013) added that the level of provision of medical services in an acceptable and balanced manner to all segments of society is a fundamental criterion through which the quality of health services can be judged. Musleh (2009) pointed to the need to adhere to medical and administrative standards and ethics, and to the need for clear standards and systems governing the health system

The quality of health services has taken an important place in research and development, as it is no longer subject to purely personal considerations or judgments in its measurement; quality has become key dimensions to be adopted as a basis for measuring and influencing the level of quality (Al-Damen, 2017). Devi and Muthuswamy (2016) indicated that the quality of the health service is an important indicator in measuring the level of satisfaction of the patient with the service provided by the hospital.

There are a number of indicators through which the importance of quality in medical services can be inferred, including the link between service and quality until it became necessary to adopt a number of measures to determine the level of satisfaction achieved in patients by linking the service provided with quality (). () pointed out a number of factors affecting the quality of health services. These elements are as follows (Essiam, 2013):

1. Analysis of patient expectations: Hospitals need to understand patients' attitudes when designing the health service so that this design is superior to patient expectations. This is the only way that enables patients to achieve high quality of service provided. Patients can achieve their perceptions of the service provided by distinguishing between different levels of quality:

- a) Expected quality: This is the degree of quality that the patient believes must exist. This level of quality is often difficult to determine as it varies depending on the characteristics of patients and their therapeutic conditions, as well as the different services they expect to be in the hospital.
- b) Perceived quality: the patient's perception of the quality of health service provided by the hospital, i.e., it represents the patient's perception of the quality of health services provided to him.
- c) Standard quality: it refers to the level of service provided, which conforms to the basic specifications of the service, which at the same time represent the perceptions of hospital management.
- d) Actual quality: the degree of quality that the hospital used to provide patients.



2. Determine the quality of services: Devi and Muthuswamy (2016) argued that when the hospital understands the needs of patients, it should establish appropriate descriptions to help ensure that the required level of quality is achieved in the health service provided. This characterization is usually associated with the performance of hospital staff and the level and efficiency of devices and equipment used in the delivery of medical service.

There is a lot of literature existed on the dimensions of service quality (). The researchers agreed on the existence of five dimensions of quality of service in general, and that patients rely in their assessment of the provided health service on the level and quality of service, as well as on these five dimensions, which include ():

- a) Reliability: the ability to perform in the achievement of what has been predetermined and accurately.
- b) Response: Real assistance in providing service to the patient.
- c) Safety (security): this includes the characteristics of the workers knowledge and ability to provide the service
- d) Empathy (kindness): the degree of care and personal attention to the patient.
- e) Tangibility: It is represented by physical capabilities, facilities, equipment, personnel and communication equipment.

## **2.2 Quality of health services in Jordanian government hospitals**

Jordan has witnessed a development in the medical field, especially in the field of establishing public and private hospitals, where (31) government hospitals and (69) private hospitals were established all over the Kingdom of Jordan. This interest in government hospitals and their efficiency came as a result of the development of health care and therapeutic organizations, which led to the emergence of legislation and the allocation of sufficient financial resources to raise the level of health services provided to citizens

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is one of the countries most concerned with health, spending 9.3% of the gross national product on health. Jordan ranks high in terms of spending on health care from GDP, which includes upgrading health facilities and medical equipment and providing training opportunities for professional staff in the field of health and support services. These practices reflected positively on the provision of distinguished medical services to Jordanian and non-Jordanian patients.

Despite the development of efforts to improve the quality of health services in Jordan, government hospitals in particular face a number of challenges that negatively affect the quality of their services.

## **2.3 Reality and challenges of health services quality in Jordanian government hospitals**

Patients in government hospital still suffer from overcrowded clinics, ambulance and emergency departments and a shortage of doctors and nurses.

This was explained by the presence of a number of patients attending clinics, ambulance and emergency departments without a satisfactory need for treatment (Rawashdeh, 2018). Hospitals and health centers are witnessing a huge increase and overcrowding in the number of patients, as the number of doctors in hospitals is not commensurate with the number of patients. On the other hand, doctors are exposing to huge pressure as a resulted of increasing the number of patients, which generates pressure that exceeds their ability to work and prevents the provision of health care and treatment for patients. Government hospitals also suffer from poor medical care, which will prevent the patients from having access to full care in diagnosing the case and obtaining the necessary treatment.

Barqawi (2016) stressed the problem of shortage of medical staff in government hospitals, where the rate of shortage is estimated from 30% to 40% with the possibility of increasing. This shortage has led many patients to seek alternative solutions and avoiding long waiting hours. In many cases, doctors are being dismissed from the Ministry of Health, and many doctors are voluntarily discharged from government hospitals every year because of a lack of incentives.

Government hospitals also suffer from a chronic shortage of medicines for chronic diseases. These comprehensive medical centers dispense treatments for patients with heart and blood pressure different in composition and name from the treatments that they used to spend in the past. In addition, there are many patients who have to buy their treatments from private pharmacies at their own expense.

There is a major problem of shortage of cadres in all health centers, especially in the technical cadres and pharmacy and the assistance of a nurse and clerks. In these cases it is possible to hand over some tasks to entities that are not specialized in the same field and not from their powers. This is considered an explicit violation of regulations and instructions.

For example, Al-Nadim Governmental Hospital in Madaba, which receives patients from Madaba governorate, Giza and Naour districts and from some areas in the Jordan Valley, suffers from a shortage of medical and nursing staff, which led to the low level of service provided to patients in the hospital, especially in the ambulance and emergency department. A number of hospital auditors pointed to the low level of service due to the shortage in the nursing staff, which is reflected in the service provided to the patient inside the departments of the hospital, in addition to the slow reception of cases that arrive ambulance and emergency treatment due to the lack of general doctors and the pressure witnessed by the hospital and borne by alternate doctors (Rawashdeh, 2018).

In Ain Al Basha, Prince Hussein Hospital suffers from the poor distribution of health cadres inside, especially in the ambulance department, in addition to the complaints of citizens of the low level of hygiene in this section and the presence of insects (ants) in it as well as the low level of the network of services responsible for cleaning services (Barqawi, 2016).

The health sector in Mafraq suffers from a number of problems,

including the need to work in the Badia and military hospitals and the waiting for long periods in government hospitals, in addition to the shortage of medicines and human cadres. Moreover, the The health sector in Mafraq suffers from the weakness of the administration represented by the absence of the role of health management in hospitals and health centers. The problems of the patients in Mafraq Government Hospitals are clearly highlighted by the increase in the number of patients in the light of the steady number of staff working in all types. This represents a major problem facing the beneficiaries of health services and service providers alike (Rawashdeh, 2018).

Most of the problems experienced by the health services in Mafraq are due to poor management of these facilities. In hospitals and health centers there is no role for the health administration in solving the problems experienced by the beneficiaries of health care, such as the phenomenon of overcrowding in health clinics, or the problem of delaying surgical operations and lack of medicines and technical staff and the failure of medical equipment, or the absence of a patient's medical bed and other problems that medical management do not seek to solve it, leading to frustration and thus reaching a state of apathy at work. This leads to poor productivity according to the youth activist.

### **3. Conclusion**

What distinguishes any hospital or medical center around the world is its specialized cadres and the devices it depends on, in addition to providing the health service in an urgent and fast manner that suits the needs of the citizen.

However, this is not the case for government hospitals in Jordan, where government hospitals and medical centers suffer from chronic problems in their services, including:

1. Lack of medical number relative to the number of reviewers.
2. Conflicting medical diagnoses from one doctor to another in the same hospital, leading to a high rate of medical errors.
3. Lack of beds.
4. Lack of cleanliness and unpleasant odors.
5. Lack of insect control in patient rooms and in health facilities, which facilitates transmission of diseases.
6. Poor infrastructure and lack of attention to periodic maintenance, especially elevators; what causes a huge burden on older patients and those with joint or foot pain.
7. Toilets are a sanitary abomination that lacks minimum hygiene.
8. Long appointments and queues.
9. Lack of seating for patients despite the length of waiting

These and many other problems require effective and systematic override by the management of government hospitals to overcome and reduce them.

Based on these results, the research recommends the following:

1. The hospital administration should be committed to providing medical services to the patient within the specified time and not to violate these appointments.

2. Give more attention by the Department of Government Hospitals to the problems of patients and related matters and provide appropriate treatment and conditions of their own.
3. Increasing interest in medical records and confidentiality and preservation in a manner that serves the patient and saves time and effort on the provider and recipients of the service.
4. Develop work systems based on the development of a system of advance appointments for treatment and inform patients of these appointments. Then confirm the appointments of patients and inform them of the need to abide by these appointments through telephone, computer or any other means can be provided. In addition, this appointment system must be linked to a referral system from medical centers to hospitals.

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