

***C*CHAPTER**

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Outpatient Department (OPD) Operations Management during Covid at Jaslok Hospital and Research Centre, Mumbai

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INTRODUCTION

In the absence of hospitals, outpatient care was traditionally provided by entities called "Dispensaries," which were administered by the government, local municipalities, and other organizations. However, these facilities lacked diagnostic capabilities. Over the years, outpatient services have become an integral component of hospitals since the beginning of the century. In numerous Western nations, primary healthcare is managed by private physicians, and not all hospitals have dedicated outpatient departments. In contrast, in India, besides private physicians, outpatient hospital facilities have become the preferred means of receiving medical treatment. The focus of hospital care has shifted from being predominantly in patient-centred to predominantly outpatient-centered [1].

The first interaction between the hospital and patients typically occurs at the outpatient department (OPD). The OPD is a distinct section of the facility equipped with specific infrastructure, clinical staff, and designated hours to cater to individuals who are not admitted as inpatients. Serving as the primary point of contact, the OPD significantly shapes the overall impression of the hospital.

Patients visiting the OPD can be categorized into three groups:

1. Emergency Out-patients
2. Referred Out-patients.
3. General Out-patients

Emergency Out-patients encompass individuals who require urgent and unforeseen medical attention, where the hospital visit is unplanned and unscheduled. Referred Out-

patients are those patients directed to a specific doctor specializing in a particular field by another healthcare professional. General Out-patients are individuals seeking medical consultation for a specific ailment, and their visits may either be pre-scheduled or spontaneous walk-ins. Quality Indicators serve as management system tools that provide insights into the organization's performance concerning quality. They help identify areas that require improvement and are utilized to monitor and evaluate various processes within the organization [2].

Indicators play a crucial role across all hospital departments, serving as metrics to gauge compliance and the quality of services rendered. Within the Out-patient Department (OPD), key indicators include waiting time for patient consultations, Turn Around Time (TAT), consultation duration, and patient satisfaction determined through feedback analysis, among others. A well-organized OPD service contributes to the overall strength of hospital care, evident in the quality indicators. Research indicates that substantial reductions in TAT and waiting time are achievable and sustainable through targeted interventions and adherence to specific guidelines. Consequently, adherence to quality guidelines in OPD processes ensures the provision of safe and high-quality services, reduces waiting times, attains organizational quality objectives, and contributes to overall improvements in healthcare [3][4].

RESEARCH QUESTION

What was the impact of COVID-19 on Outpatient Department (OPD) operations at Jaslok Hospital & Research Centre in Mumbai?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. To investigate and compile data on OPD indicators such as Turn-Around Time (TAT), waiting time, consultation time, and patient satisfaction.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of OPD services during the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. To propose measures to reduce TAT, waiting time, and increase OPD numbers and consultation time, taking into consideration the challenges posed by the COVID-19 situation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A prospective observational study was undertaken within the Out-patient Department (OPD) of the hospital to comprehensively evaluate key indicators and their influence on service quality. The study employed a simple random sampling technique to ensure a fair and diverse representation of patients visiting the OPD during the designated study period, minimizing selection bias. Data collection spanned a predetermined period of three months, from April to June. During this period, meticulous records were maintained for each patient, encompassing waiting time, Turn Around Time (TAT), consultation duration, and feedback. This systematic recording aimed to capture a holistic view of the OPD's operational dynamics.

Patient satisfaction, a pivotal aspect of service quality, was assessed using structured feedback forms. Responses gathered from these forms underwent a detailed analysis to identify discernible patterns and trends, providing valuable insights into patient experiences. To assess the OPD's performance objectively, key indicators were meticulously

compared with established benchmarks and industry guidelines. This comparative analysis served as a benchmarking tool to gauge the OPD's effectiveness in meeting industry standards. Building upon the research findings, targeted interventions were implemented to address areas requiring improvement, with a particular focus on enhancing Turn Around Time (TAT) and reducing waiting times. Continuous monitoring of adherence to specific guidelines was prioritized to ensure sustained effectiveness and consistency in service delivery.

Quantitative analysis, employing statistical methods, was conducted to measure the impact of the implemented interventions on key indicators. Descriptive statistics, such as means and percentages, were utilized to present the findings in a clear and comprehensible manner, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In 2021, OPD numbers decreased by 56.95% compared to 2019, with 12,849 patients in 2019 and 5,532 patients in 2021. Waiting time increased slightly from 28 minutes in 2019 to 32.1 minutes in 2021. The average consultation time was 7.5 minutes, and the Turn-Around Time was 1 hour and 20 minutes. Patient satisfaction was high, with 88.26% expressing a positive overall OPD experience.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to assess patient experiences by examining crucial medical service indicators in Jaslok Hospital's OPD during the pandemic. Identified issues required attention for further improvement in service quality. Infrastructure enhancements, especially at the entrance and reception, were

necessary for enhanced patient comfort. Additionally, improvements to the waiting room, such as making it more informative and pleasant, were recommended. While patients were satisfied with clinicians' healthcare services, effective communication in layman's terms was crucial for further enhancing the overall patient experience.

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