

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

QUALITY IN AN ACCREDITED HOSPITAL IN THE PERCEPTION OF NURSING PROFESSIONALS

Andressa Hirata Cervilheri¹, Mariana Angela Rossaneis², Larissa Gutierrez de Carvalho Silva³, Maria do Carmo Lourenço Haddad⁴, Raquel Gvozd Costa⁵

ABSTRACT

Objective: to identify the perception of nursing professionals about the quality of service in an accredited hospital.

Method: cross-sectional, quantitative study, conducted from April to July 2018 in an accredited tertiary hospital. It was developed with 223 nursing professionals using an instrument with socio-demographic and occupational data and using the adapted Service Performance scale and analyzed using Pearson's chi-square test.

Results: the quality of the institution was perceived as good in all aspects analyzed, which converges to the expected results of the Accreditation process. The SERVPERF items were related to each item of sociodemographic and occupational characterization, and the variables with the greatest statistically significant difference were length of experience at the institution, age and gender, respectively.

Conclusion: The involvement of nursing professionals reflects in the provision of quality care services, and their sociodemographic and occupational characteristics influence the perception of the institution's quality.


DESCRIPTORS: Hospital Accreditation; Quality management; Nursing team; Health Care Quality; Hospital Administration.


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¹Nurse. Master student in Nursing. State University of Maringá. Maringá, PR, Brazil. 

²Nurse. PhD in Rehabilitation Sciences. Professor of Nursing and Graduate Nursing, State University of Londrina. Maringá, PR, Brazil. 

³Nurse. PhD in Sciences. Professor of Nursing and Graduate Nursing, State University of Londrina. Maringá, PR, Brazil. 

⁴Nurse. PhD in Nursing. Graduate Professor in Nursing. State University of Londrina. Maringá, PR, Brazil. 

⁵Nurse. PhD in Nursing. Professor of Nursing and Graduate Nursing, State University of Londrina. Maringá, PR, Brazil. 

QUALIDADE EM HOSPITAL ACREDITADO NA PERCEPÇÃO DOS PROFISSIONAIS DE ENFERMAGEM

RESUMO

Objetivo: identificar a percepção de profissionais de enfermagem sobre a qualidade do serviço em um hospital acreditado.

Método: estudo transversal, quantitativo, realizado de abril a julho de 2018 em hospital terciário acreditado. Foi desenvolvido com 223 profissionais de enfermagem mediante aplicação de um instrumento com dados sociodemográficos e ocupacionais, e pela escala Service Performance adaptada, e analisados por meio do teste qui-quadrado de Pearson.

Resultados: a qualidade da instituição foi percebida como boa em todos os aspectos analisados, o que converge para os resultados esperados do processo da Acreditação. Os itens da SERVPERF foram relacionados com cada item de caracterização sociodemográfica e ocupacional, e as variáveis com maior diferença estatisticamente significativa foram tempo de atuação na instituição, idade e sexo, respectivamente.

Conclusão: O envolvimento dos profissionais de enfermagem reflete na prestação dos serviços assistenciais com qualidade, e suas características sociodemográficas e ocupacionais influenciam na percepção da qualidade da instituição.

DESCRITORES: Acreditação Hospitalar; Gestão da Qualidade; Equipe de Enfermagem; Qualidade da Assistência à Saúde; Administração Hospitalar.

CALIDAD EN HOSPITAL ACREDITADO DESDE LA PERCEPCIÓN DE LOS PROFESIONALES DE ENFERMERÍA

RESUMEN

Objetivo: identificar la percepción de los profesionales de enfermería sobre la calidad del servicio en un hospital acreditado.

Método: estudio transversal, cuantitativo, realizado entre abril y julio de 2018 en un hospital terciario acreditado. Se llevó a cabo con 223 profesionales de enfermería con la utilización de un instrumento con datos sociodemográficos y ocupacionales y mediante la adaptación de la escala de rendimiento de servicio Service Performance. El análisis de datos se realizó con la prueba de chi-cuadrado de Pearson.

Resultados: Se reconoció la calidad de la institución, que se consideró "buena" en todos los aspectos, lo que converge hacia los resultados esperados del proceso de Acreditación. Los ítems de la SERVPERF se relacionaron con cada ítem de caracterización sociodemográfica y ocupacional y las variables que presentaron mayor diferencia estadística significativa fueron el tiempo de actuación en la institución, la edad y el sexo, respectivamente.

Conclusión: La implicancia de los profesionales de enfermería se refleja en la prestación de los servicios asistenciales de calidad, y sus características sociodemográficas y/u ocupacionales influyen sobre sus percepciones sobre de la calidad de la institución.

DESCRIPTORES: Acreditación Hospitalaria; Gestión de Calidad; Equipo de Enfermería; Calidad de la Asistencia a la Salud; Administración Hospitalaria.

INTRODUCTION

Institutions that provide services in the health sector, need investments and different resources due to the complexity of their demands⁽¹⁾. In this context, quality management is guided by operational efficiency, including the optimization of resources, as well as the satisfaction of internal and external customers and minimization of risks related to care practice⁽²⁻³⁾.

From the perspective of quality in health, evaluative measures are necessary as a management tool in the control and advancement of service improvements⁽⁴⁾. In this context there is the Accreditation, a quality management system used to assess health organizations using previously defined criteria and standards⁽⁵⁾. The Accreditation process grants possible quality certification to health services, it is carried out in a systematic, periodic and reserved manner by evaluators external to the institution⁽¹⁾.

In Brazil, Accreditation is voluntary and conducted mostly by the National Accreditation Organization (*Organização Nacional de Acreditação* (ONA)), which certifies institutions at three levels: accredited - meets the criteria for patient safety in all areas of activity; fully accredited - in addition to the security criteria, it presents integrated management, adopting planning measures, such as the use of protocols; accredited with excellence - it is based on the principle of excellence in management, meeting the requirements of previous levels, and also demonstrates an organizational culture of continuous improvement and indicators for evaluating results⁽⁵⁾.

In addition, evaluation measures that include the institution's internal clients are tools that add significantly in the context of health quality. They are fundamental in quality assurance, given that in order to put quality principles and values into practice, the involvement of professionals is essential, as well as identifying their perceptions and aspirations⁽⁶⁾. Therefore, a model for assessing the quality of services is the Service Performance (SERVPERF) scale, developed by Cronin & Taylor in the light of Service Quality (SERVQUAL)⁽⁷⁾.

As workers are fundamental in the process to achieve an organizational environment closer to excellence, it is considered important to assess the quality of health services in the perception of nursing professionals, as these are the largest professional category in the hospital context. Also, in view of the professionals' commitment to the effectiveness of hospital accreditation, it is necessary to know how they evaluate the quality of service. Thus, the objective of this study is to identify the perception of nursing professionals about the quality of service in an accredited hospital.

METHOD

This is a cross-sectional study, with a quantitative approach, carried out from April to July 2018 in a private tertiary hospital accredited level 1 by ONA, located in southern Brazil. The referred institution has 243 beds for clinical and surgical hospitalization, achieved the Accreditation seal in 2015 and is in the process of adapting in order to receive the next levels of accreditation.

The research population comprised nursing professionals based in all sectors of the institution: administrative; outpatient; clinical and surgical hospitalization units; intensive care units; emergency care and surgical center. The sample (n=223) consisted of nursing professionals, which include nurses and nursing assistants/technicians, with the population determined by proportional stratified sampling from a total population of 523.

Data collection took place at the work place and shift of the professionals, who were

approached with the explanation of the research and agreeing their participation by the Free and Informed Consent Form, offered in two copies together with the data collection instrument. The professionals could fill in at the time of the approach or later, after a certain time interval.

The adapted data collection instrument was composed of two parts. The first was driven by sociodemographic and occupational data, which include: date of birth; gender; professional category; higher academic degree; work sector; work shift; professional experience time; length of service at the institution and number of employment relationships.

The second part was the SERVPERF scale adapted from the validated SERVQUAL scale⁽⁶⁾, a psychometric scale composed of 14 items for analyzing perceptions, and eight questions to assess the importance of characteristics related to the quality of hospital health services.

The 14 statements related to the perception of service in relation to quality were identified with the letter P followed by the Arabic number, with each statement referring to a certain aspect for the evaluation of quality: P1 - appropriate clothing; P2 - dissemination of services; P3 - problem solving; P4 - service effectiveness; P5 - compliance with deadlines; P6 - effective communication; P7 - immediate services; P8 - willingness to help; P9 - employee reliability; P10 - security in services; P11 - educated employees; P12 - individualized attention; P13 - prioritization of customers and; P14 - specific needs of customers. The statements were evaluated by a Likert scale measured from one to five points, considering that one corresponded to the lowest evaluation and five to the best evaluation.

In sequence, the eight questions evaluated referring to the five dimensions of quality were: 1. tangibility, related to the physical appearance, facilities and appearance of the workers; 2. reliability, which refers to the ability to provide a reliable and accurate service; 3. responsiveness, which deals with the willingness to provide services promptly and willingly to help clients; 4. guarantee, aimed at the courtesy of workers and ability to inspire confidence and; 5. empathy, which is determined by individualized attention to clients⁽⁸⁾.

The questions related to the dimensions of quality comprised five enumerated statements, in which professionals should distribute a total of 100 points according to the importance of each one. Then, the sentences should be indicated according to their number as to the most important, second most important and least important⁽⁶⁾.

Data analysis was carried out with the elaboration of the database in Microsoft Excel and subsequent export of the data to the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) 20.0 program. For inferential statistical analysis, the data were submitted to Pearson's chi-square test. For this, the items on the Likert scale were categorized as negative or neutral, covering items 1, 2 and 3 and good or positive assessment, referring to items 4 and 5. Still, the following variables were recategorized: Professional category (nurses; mid-level professionals); higher academic degree (no degree; postgraduate); work shift (day, night); professional experience time (up to five years; over five years); time in the institution (up to one year, over one year) and; employment relationship (one job; two or more jobs).

This study was developed in the light of the research project entitled "Quality in health: cross-cultural adaptation and validation of SERVQUAL for health professionals in Brazil", approved by the ethics committee of the *Escola de Enfermagem de Ribeirão Preto-SP* under opinion n° 057/2015 on 05 May 2015.

RESULTS

223 nursing professionals participated in the research, 58 (26%) were nurses and 165 (74%) mid-level nursing professionals. As for gender, 198 (89%) were women and 25 (11%) men. The age varied between 18 and 64 years old, with an average of 34.4 years

old. Professionals who had a postgraduate degree, including specialization, master's and doctorate, represented 49 (22%) interviewed.

Workers who had two or more employment relationships comprised 74 (33%) respondents. The highest prevalence of employees had been working at the institution for over a year, equivalent to 146 (65.5%) professionals, and had professional experience up to five years, referring to 136 (61%) interviewed.

Table 1 shows position measures for the 14 items of SERVPERF according to Perceptions (P) in relation to the service provided in a hospital institution accredited from the perspective of nursing professionals.

Table 1 - Position measurements of the SERVPERF perception items (P) for the 223 nursing professionals interviewed at an accredited tertiary hospital. Maringá, PR, Brazil, 2018

PERCEPTIONS		Q1*	Median	Q3 [†]
P1	The employees of this institution dress appropriately for their professional activities.	4	5	5
P2	The publicity materials related to the services provided, such as pamphlets, brochures or inserts are visually attractive in this health institution.	4	5	5
P3	When a client has a problem, this healthcare institution shows a sincere interest in solving it.	4	5	5
P4	This health institution performs the service correctly at the first time.	4	4	5
P5	This health institution performs the services within the scheduled time.	4	4	5
P6	The employees of this health institution inform the client when the services will be performed.	4	5	5
P7	The employees of this health institution provide immediate services to the clients.	4	4	5
P8	The employees of this institution are always willing to help clients.	4	5	5
P9	The behavior of the employees of this institution conveys confidence to clients.	4	4	5
P10	Clients feel secure with the services provided by this healthcare institution.	4	4	5
P11	The employees of this health institution are always polite to clients.	4	4	5
P12	This health institution has employees who offer individualized attention to clients.	3	4	5
P13	This health institution prioritizes clients' interests.	4	5	5
P14	The employees of this health institution understand the specific needs of clients.	4	5	5

*Q1 – First quartile; [†]Q3 – Third quartile.

Source: Prepared by the author (2018)

Table 1 shows the quartiles referring to the five-point Likert scale of the 14 items of the adapted SERVPERF, showing that the third quartile presented the maximum value, five,

in all SERVPERF items, and the second quartile (median) remained between four and five, demonstrating that the quality of the institution was well evaluated in all aspects analyzed.

SERVPERF items were related to each sociodemographic and occupational characterization item. There was a statistically significant difference in relation to age, categorized as up to 35 years old and 35 or older, in the following items referring to the quality dimension: P8, referring to the willingness of employees to help clients ($p=0.02$), which was evaluated with good quality by 106 (84%) of professionals up to 35 years old and 65 (94.1%) of people over 35 years old; P9, related to the transmission of trust to clients ($p<0.00$), evaluated with good quality by 107 (84.6%) interviewees aged up to 35 years old and 68 (98.5%) of those aged 35 or over; P12, referring to individualized attention to clients ($p=0.04$), identified with good quality by 87 (68.8%) of people up to 35 years old and 55 (79.7%) among those who were 35 or older and; P14, which refers to the understanding of the specific needs of the clients ($p=0.01$), assessed with good quality by 101 (80.1%) of professionals up to 35 years old and 65 (94.2%) of people over 35 years old.

The variable that presented the greatest number of items with a statistically significant difference was length of experience at the institution, categorized as up to one year and over one year, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 - Opinion of nursing professionals at an accredited hospital on the SERVPERF items according to the length of service. Maringá, PR, Brazil, 2018

Variables	Time of performance in the institution				P-value
	Up to one year Good evaluation		More than one year Good evaluation		
	N	%	N	%	
P2 (dissemination of services)	68	89.5	111	77.1	0.02
P3 (problem resolution)	70	92.1	107	74.8	0.00
P4 (service effectiveness)	66	88	108	77.7	0.04
P5 (term compliance)	66	88	104	73.2	0.01
P11 (polite employees)	67	88.2	109	77.3	0.03
P12 (individualized attention)	64	84.2	95	66.9	0.00
P13 (prioritization of customers)	68	94.4	107	76.4	0.00

Source: Prepared by the author (2018)

In addition, there was a statistically significant difference in the gender variable in the following items: P3, referring to problem solving ($p=0.02$), analyzed with good quality by 24 (96%) among men and 157 (79.2%) among women; P4, related to performing the service correctly at the first time ($p=0.03$), evaluated with good quality by 24 (96%) of men and 157 (79.2%) of women and; P8, which refers to the willingness to help clients ($p=0.03$), which was evaluated with good quality by 25 (100%) men and 171 (86.2%) women.

The variables professional category, degree and work shift showed a statistically significant difference in only one item each, and the professional category, categorized as nurses and mid-level professionals, showed significance in item P11, referring to the politeness of employees with clients ($p=0.04$), which was evaluated with good quality by 42 (72.4%) of nurses and 139 (84.2%) of mid-level professionals.

Degree, categorized in no degree and postgraduate, showed significance in item P14, alluding to the understanding of the specific needs of clients ($p=0.02$), evaluated with good quality by 153 (87.9%) of professionals who did not have a degree and 36 (73.5%) of those with postgraduate degrees. Work shift, categorized as day and night, showed significance of item P3, which is related to problem solving ($p=0.02$), analyzed with good quality by 145 (84.3%) of professionals who work during the day and 35 (70%) among those who work at night.

Then, to assess the relative importance of service quality, a total of 100 points were distributed among the five sentences regarding the dimensions of quality: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, guarantee and empathy, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 - Distribution of the values attributed by the nursing professionals of an accredited hospital in relation to the five dimensions of SERVPERF ($n=223$). Southern Brazil, 2018

Variables (Sentences)	Min	Max	Mean	PD
Tangibility	0	50	20.4	8.25
Reliability	2	50	20.17	6.45
Responsiveness	2	60	18.89	6.77
Guarantee	0	50	20.68	8.01
Empathy	0	50	19.83	8.96

Source: Prepared by the author (2018)

*Respondents were instructed to assign a value from 0 to 100 for each sentence.

The professionals indicated the most important sentence/dimension as reliability, totaling 68 (31.3%), followed by guarantee 60 (27.6%). In the dimension considered as the second most important, the guarantee, constituting 60 (27.6%), was the most marked, followed by 53 (24.4%) regarding responsiveness. Subsequently, the least important dimension was marked, and most professionals, 114 (53.8%) considered tangibility.

DISCUSSION

The quality positively assessed by nursing professionals, as shown in Table 1, converges to the expected results of the Accreditation process, which is defined by a quality management system based on the improvement of services⁽⁹⁾. Thus, the items that include the SERVPERF scale that determine the assessment of the quality dimension⁽⁶⁾, once highlighting positive results in all aspects analyzed by nursing professionals, ratify the effectiveness of Accreditation regarding the quality of services provided.

Highlighting the assessment from the perspective of nursing professionals, considering that they contemplate the largest professional category in the hospital area, and also considering the provision of their services directly to clients internal to the institution, therefore, closely linked to the main services offered in health care, they legitimize quality assessment within the scope of Accreditation⁽⁵⁾.

In accordance with the above, quality in health is conceptualized as the direct

relationship among service providers and patients, which permeates all processes of the activity of organizations, which makes it a joint objective among all the involved⁽¹⁰⁾. Thus, the accountability of nursing professionals when providing quality care services, especially in the context of accreditation, validates the reliability of quality in its scope in the institution and enables the relevance of quality assessment from the perspective of these professionals.

The positive assessment of quality in all aspects analyzed in the accreditation scenario can be seen in the perception of nursing professionals regarding the guarantee of the resources necessary to provide services with quality that the accreditation provides. Employees working in an accredited service consider themselves to be better prepared to meet the needs of clients, as more qualified technical, material and human resources are made possible, with a view to standardizing routines and better organization of processes⁽¹¹⁾.

Although the quality in the institution was well evaluated in general by all professionals, there was significance in the correlations of the items with the sociodemographic and occupational characterizations, which demonstrates that the perception of quality is influenced by the characteristics of the interviewees, whether in relation to their intrinsic factors, such as age, or regarding their situation at the institution, such as length of service or shift. It was found that there was a better assessment of quality by workers who were over 35 years old, which shows that older people tend to assess quality more positively due to the longer experience.

On the other hand, the variable length of experience at the institution was the one with the most items with statistically significant differences, totaling 50% of the total items, with the best evaluation by professionals who have worked at the institution for less than a year. Considering that the time in the service influences the professionals' perception regarding the organizational culture, which is directly related to the permanence of a certain group of workers of the institution, since the employee turnover makes the consolidation of values difficult⁽¹²⁾, it is assumed that the shorter the time inserted and working in the service, the less is the time to diagnose the possible "failures" of institutional processes that may reflect on quality and, consequently, on its evaluation.

Regarding gender, it was found that men rated quality better than women. This data denotes the proportionality related to gender and in this study the vast majority are women (89% of professionals), corroborating the predominance of women in the context of nursing⁽¹³⁾.

As for the difference in quality assessment according to the professional category, mid-level professionals rated this item as better in relation to nurses. It is considered that professional nurses are more discerning due to their scientific perspective of the higher education profession, refuting the idea of common sense and showing that scientific, professional and academic praxis have an influence on the perception of nurses⁽¹⁴⁾. This justification can also be applied to the perspective of professionals who have a postgraduate degree in relation to those who do not have a degree, since quality was also better assessed by professionals without a degree.

In continuity with the correlation of the items with the characterizations of the interviewees, the work shift showed a statistically significant difference: the professionals who work during the day evaluated the problem-solving item better than the professionals who worked at night. Despite the fact that nursing activities are uninterrupted and performed continuously during the day and night⁽¹⁵⁾, support services, as those of an administrative nature and other assistance activities, such as exams and surgeries, except on an urgent basis, occur during the day, resulting in greater resolution of demands.

Still, the distributions of the dimensions of quality show a greater standard deviation of the sentences referring to tangibility, guarantee and empathy, which reveals a greater divergence in the agreement among professionals regarding the importance among these dimensions of quality. This result corroborates with the last stage of the questionnaire, when the most important and second most important dimensions are listed, respectively, reliability and guarantee, which showed less standard deviation, revealing reliability in the

general perception of the study population regarding the importance of these dimensions.

Thus, the dimension considered as the most important was reliability, which is the institution's ability to provide the service in a reliable and accurate manner. This result corroborates with studies related to SERVQUAL and its adaptations, such as SERVPERF, used in this study⁽⁶⁾. The dimension considered least important by the institution's workers was tangibility, related to the physical appearance, facilities and appearance of the workers, considerably listed by the participants, corroborating with studies that evaluated the quality in hospital institutions^(6,16).

As limitations of the study, the specificities of the location chosen for analysis are considered, as well as the assessment of the quality of services only by the nursing team. Despite this, it is believed that the research contributes to the management of hospital quality by providing subsidies for managers, especially for those who aim to implement Accreditation, with regard to the support of more assertive decision-making about the insertion of nursing professionals, taking into account that they are the largest professional category in the hospital context and provide services directly to the institution's external clients.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The consistent and positively assessed quality in the context of Accreditation in the study highlights the importance of this quality management system in the context of health institutions. The involvement of nursing professionals, the largest professional category in this scenario, is reflected in the provision of quality care services and, therefore, in the institution as a whole.

The study demonstrated that the sociodemographic and occupational characteristics of the professionals influence their perception of quality in the hospital, especially with regard to length of service. Reliability was reliably listed by professionals as the most important dimension of quality, and tangibility as the least important.

This study can contribute to hospital quality management in relation to assertive decision-making, with regard to the inclusion of all professionals, especially nurses, in the processes related to Accreditation.

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Corresponding author:

Andressa Hirata Cevilheri

Universidade Estadual de Maringá

Av. Colombo, 5790 - 87020-900 - Maringá, PR, Brasil

E-mail: andressahirata.c@gmail.com

Role of Authors:

Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work - AHC, MAR, LGCS

Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content - AHC, MAR, LGCS, MCLH, RGC

Final approval of the version to be published - AHC, MAR, LGCS, MCLH, RGC

Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved - AHC
