

CSISG Q4 RESULTS: HEALTHCARE SECTOR

Service of non-medical staff just as important

Interactions with administrative staff and allied health professionals have the biggest effect on customer satisfaction in the Restructured Hospitals sub-sector **BY KHOO BEE KHIM**

SINGAPORE – When it comes to determining customer satisfaction in the healthcare sector, it might come as a surprise that it is not the doctors and nurses, but the non-medical staff who can earn the industry a thumbs up.

That was Mr Koh Boon Chye's sentiments after his then 69-year-old wife underwent surgery for colon cancer at Alexandra Hospital last year. "I was more worried over the payment mode than my wife's operation because I believe the doctors will do their best.

"For instance, do I pay using insurance?" recalled the 71-year-old retiree. "Should I use her Medisave account or Pioneer Generation subsidies? It was confusing. I was glad for the financial-counselling staff's advice, so I can focus on helping my wife recover."

2015 Customer Satisfaction Index of Singapore (CSISG) – Healthcare Sector Results

The Healthcare sector tumbled by 1.42 points (-2 per cent) to 69.6 points from 2014. The Healthcare sector was measured with the Finance & Insurance sector. The data was collected from 9,399 face-to-face interviews with locals and 350 departing tourists at Changi Airport between October 2015 and January 2016. A total of 9,749 unique responses cover 622 companies and entities in the Healthcare, and Finance & Insurance sectors.



SCORE: 69.6



POLYCLINICS

improved by
1.1 PER CENT



SCORE: 72



PRIVATE HOSPITALS

improved by
0.6 PER CENT



SCORE: 68.6



RESTRUCTURED HOSPITALS

dipped by
1 PER CENT



SCORE: 69.4



GENERAL PRACTITIONERS

dipped by
2.9 PER CENT



SCORE: 69.7



OTHER HEALTHCARE
(consists of dental and traditional Chinese medicine clinics)

dipped by
3.4 PER CENT

Mr Koh's experience underpins the importance of administrative staff in restructured hospitals.

In the 2015 Customer Satisfaction Index of Singapore (CSISG)'s fourth-quarter results shared by the Institute of Service Excellence at the Singapore Management University (ISES), interactions with administrative staff, followed by allied health professionals (such as dietitians, occupational therapists and physiotherapists), had the greatest impact on customer satisfaction in the Restructured Hospitals sub-sector under the Healthcare sector.

NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGES BUT ...

In the CSISG Q4 results, the five sub-sectors that make up the Healthcare sector did not show statistically significant changes from the year before.

The two sub-sectors that showed improvements are the Polyclinics (69.6 points; a record 1.1 per cent gain) and Private Hospitals (72 points; 0.6 per cent gain). The rest — Restructured Hospitals (68.6 points; -1 per cent), General Practitioners (69.4 points; -2.9 per cent) and Other Healthcare that consists of dental and traditional Chinese medicine clinics (69.7 points; -3.4 per cent) — dipped.

On the whole, the Healthcare sector's performance contracted by 2 per cent from 2014, giving it 69.6 points this year. In turn, this has contributed to the 1.3-per-cent dip in the 2015 CSISG overall results. A decline hasn't been seen since 2011.

According to Mr Chen Yongchang, lead CSISG researcher, the drop in the Healthcare sector is "due in large part to the Restructured Hospitals

sub-sector".

He said: "Although in itself not a statistically significant fall, our public hospitals contribute a significant share to the Healthcare sector score. Thus, the score improvements in the Private Hospitals and Polyclinics sub-sectors were not sufficient to lift the overall Healthcare score."

QUALITY SERVICE

In the Private Hospitals sub-sector, Mount Alvernia Hospital is the only hospital to score a statistically significant improvement from 70.3 to 72.6 points, according to the CSISG survey results.

The CSISG survey wasn't the only benchmark of customer satisfaction that Mount Alvernia Hospital met. It also did well at the Singapore Health Quality Service Award (SHQ-SA) held this January. The hospital bagged 127 awards, including four star awards, eight gold awards and 115 silver awards.

The total number of awards "represents a 50-per-cent increase in the number of winners honoured last year", said Mr Goh Hock Soon, Mount Alvernia Hospital's director of corporate development.

Mr Goh shared that all hospital staff, including nursing and clinical staff, have to attend a certified service professional course and a service innovation initiative programme. The purpose is to encourage the staff to generate innovative ideas "to raise the quality of our service delivery", he said.

On the customer service front, one

of Mount Alvernia Hospital's service-oriented initiatives allows patients to complete a pre-admission registration on the hospital's website to help expedite registration at the admission counter.

MAKING APPOINTMENTS HELPS

The factor determining customer satisfaction for the Polyclinics sub-sector varies from the Restructured Hospitals sub-sector, owing to the different journey that patients take upon arrival at the polyclinic. Here, a shorter waiting time translates into a more satisfied patient.

A further look at this touchpoint reveals that appointment-making is a contributing factor to the significant upward swing: Patients with appointments rated the waiting time touchpoint 7.1 out of 10. Those without averaged only 5 points.

TECHNOLOGY AND PROCESSES

An ally that has helped polyclinics to cut down the waiting time and improve customer satisfaction is technology.

The National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP) has the miHealthCare app and the Online Appointment System via NHGP's website to enable patients to make Same Day Appointments (SDA) as well as advanced ones.

"Over the past year, more patients have understood the benefits of getting an SDA and the take-up rate has gone up to 40 per cent," said Dr Peter Chow, chief operating officer of NHGP, which operates nine polyclinics in Singapore. SingHealth Polyclinics (SHP),



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LEAD CSISG RESEARCHER

which also runs nine polyclinics, is no stranger to technology either. Patients can use the SingHealth Online Appointment System on its website or the Health Buddy app to make, change and cancel appointments.

Building on the improvement seen in the Polyclinics sub-sector's medication collection touchpoint, SHP is currently testing a new initiative called PILBOX. The 28 locker-box system at the redesigned SHP - Marine Parade lets patients collect their prescription refills at any time of the day. If successful, the PILBOX system may be replicated in other SHPs.

THE HUMAN TOUCH

SHP's pilot programme Case Management, which kicked off in February 2015 at five of its polyclinics, is a sign that human interaction is as crucial as technology upgrading to the healthcare industry.

As part of the programme, social workers from voluntary welfare organisation GoodLife! visit patients, especially those with chronic conditions, at home to check if they're coping well. They note the patients' progress and update SHP staff, so that when patients check in at the polyclinic on their next appointment, the doctors are already aware of their progress.

Depending on the severity of the patients' conditions, the visits' frequency can vary from weekly to daily.

This report is a collaborative project between TODAY and the Institute of Service Excellence at Singapore Management University.