

Improvement of customer focus in a Swiss regional hospital pharmacy: a mixed method study

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Abstract

Objectives: To establish how the use of customer feedback could be enhanced within a Swiss regional hospital pharmacy.

Methods: The study was divided into three parts, each comprising several smaller complementary studies. The first part determined the pharmacy's current way of functioning in relation to customer-focused activities using qualitative methods (pharmacy systematic document research, qualitative interviews and a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis). The second part was designed to define the requirements related to an optimal customer focused quality management system (QMS); these were obtained from two quality standards (ISO 9001 and the Référentiel Qualité pour la Pharmacie Hospitalière), Swiss laws, the pharmacy staff and other organisations. In the third part these requirements were cross-checked (mostly in a qualitative way) against observations of the current functioning in order to generate suggestions for improvement. A quantitative quality self-assessment was carried out to evaluate the pharmacy's response to the quality requirements and to prioritise the ones that needed to be improved.

Results: The first part revealed that the methods used to collect information about customer requirements and satisfaction were sparse and that the internal structure, procedures and employee knowledge were also insufficient. The second part brought into focus the importance for all pharmacy employees to share the same understanding of customer feedback in order to develop a customer-focused QMS. In the last part, numerous suggestions for improvement were made. These included developing tools to collect customer feedback, establishing a systematic analysis of customer feedback for decision making, and developing a corporate culture and providing appropriate training to develop the knowledge and skills of employees.

Conclusions: Weaknesses concerning the functioning of the entire pharmacy were identified and many suggestions for improvement of the pharmacy's functioning in relation to customer focus were made. The results of this study indicate that employee knowledge and involvement are paramount to the success of a customer-focused QMS. It is considered critical that all staff should share the same understanding and aim. Thus, training and active involvement of pharmacy employees is regarded as fundamental to the success of a new system.