Comparison of Corporate Image and Patient Loyalty Perceptions of Outpatients and Inpatients: Example of a Training and Research Hospital in Ankara

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Extensive Summary

1. Introduction

Corporate image, which was until recently considered to be an uncertainty and a worrisome concept by organizations including their senior managers yet also known to have a critical importance for corporate success, is essential for both commercial and non-profit organizations. Representing all objectives and plans of the organization and aiming to reflect these onto target populations, stakeholders and employees through suitable communication methods, corporate image may bring in advantages to organizations in several different aspects (Gray and Balmer, 1998, pp. 697-699; Bakan, 2005, p. 37)

Examining the matter of corporate image in terms of health organizations, which have an economic and a social dimension, shows that health organizations are primarily customer oriented. Accordingly, in order to attain continuous success and maintain their existence, also health organizations need to earn the favor and meet the needs of their target markets. Health organizations may successfully create a positive image by maintaining their relations with patients well (Karafakioglu, 1998, p.26; Cinaroglu and Sahin, 2011) Positive image directs patients to prefer a health organization to another one and to apply to the preferred hospital while determining their priorities; in other words contributes to the creation of patient loyalty (Derin and Demirel, 2010)

International studies included in the related literature emphasize that the image of health organizations affect patient loyalty. Although the studies conducted on health organizations in Turkey addressed these two concepts independently from each other, studies conducted on other sectors draw attention to the potential relation between these two concepts.
2. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to determine the level of corporate image and patient loyalty of outpatients and inpatients who get services from a hospital and to evaluate the relationship between corporate images’ factors and patient loyalty.

Totally 600 patients from a training and research hospitals in Ankara, formed the study sample. While personal information forms were used within the scope of the study in order to determine the demographic characteristics of the patients, corporate image questionnaire was used to determine the corporate image levels of health organizations and patient loyalty questionnaire was used for the purpose of determining patient loyalty. Data collection tools were applied through face to face interviews with the patients.

The data summarized with descriptive statistics, independent samples t-test were used to detect differences and correlation and regression analysis were used to summarize the relationship between the variables.

3. Findings and Discussions

As a result, the effect of corporate image factors on patient loyalty was determined that there is a statistically significant, strong and positive correlation and 83% of patient loyalty is explained by corporate image factors. The study Derin and Demirel (2010) conducted on the polyclinic patients of a hospital examined the effect of the recognition of the health organization on patients’ behaviors and reported the presence of a positive and significant relation. In the study Ayhan and Canoz (2006) conducted on the patients of a private hospital; the authors examined the public relations activities that are effective on patients' choices of hospitals. In another study conducted on private hospitals, it was reported that corporate image has 74% effect on patient loyalty and that in the relation between corporate image and patient loyalty the factors of patient satisfaction and service quality play critical roles (Wu, 2011). In the study conducted by Suki (2011), it is reported that physicians' reputation and image are the most effective factors on patient loyalty. The results obtained from these studies exhibit similarities from the findings of the present study.

In addition, outpatients’ loyalty and image perceptions found medium level; while inpatients’ level found high. In order to determine the behavior and attitudes of inpatients and outpatients in similar studies conducted were found that there are attitudes and behavior differences between patients.Gouveia et al. (2003) examined the level of satisfaction of inpatients and outpatients and found that the level of satisfaction is higher in inpatients. Similarly, Berghofer, et al. (2001) found that patients who spend a longer time in health care facilities have more positive impression than short term patients. Based on the research findings, making improvements especially in quality and also physical, communication, social responsibility factors can obtain loyal patients. It is suggested to adopt different strategies to outpatients and inpatients while implementing these improvements.