

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) In Health Care Industry - A Study Of Select Corporate Hospitals In Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh

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CRM - THE CONCEPT

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is perhaps the most important concept of modern marketing. Until recently, CRM has been defined narrowly as a customer data management activity. In its broader sense, CRM is the overall process of building and maintaining profitable customer relationships by delivering superior customer value and satisfaction. It deals with all aspects of acquiring, keeping and growing customers. The key to building lasting customer relationships is to create superior customer value and satisfaction. Organizations can build customer relationships at many levels, depending on the nature of the target market. To build customer relationships, companies can add structural ties as well as financial and social benefits.

Today's companies are building more direct and lasting relationships with more carefully selected customers. Changing demographics, more sophisticated competitors mean that there are fewer customers to go around. Many organizations are now fighting for shares of flat or fading markets. In addition to being good at customer relationship management, marketers must also be good at partner relationship management, which means working closely with partners in other company departments and outside the company to jointly bring greater value to customers. Thus, the goal of marketing is to build and manage profitable customer relationships.

Successful CRM focuses on the profiling or understanding the needs and desires of the customers and is achieved by placing these needs at the heart of the business by integrating them with the organization's strategy, people, and technology and business processes. CRM requires a synergistic integration of the strategy, people and technology of an organization. This integration leads to the creation of the service process that seek to develop an ongoing relationship with customers and results in creation of an exchange relationship that is mutually beneficial for both the organization and the customer. CRM must come from the top. It is an all-encompassing strategy, and no one department or Call center or Information Technology manager can drive the cross-functional process changes required. Thus, CRM is a Holistic approach.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

With this backdrop, the present paper mainly focuses on achieving the following specific objectives:

1. To present a broad view of the healthcare sector.
2. To highlight the importance of CRM in the healthcare sector.
3. To study the marketing implications of the healthcare sector.
4. To understand the CRM practices adopted by selected corporate hospitals to promote their health services.

IMPORTANCE OF CRM

The customer is in reality the king, the one who makes the difference between a company's success and failure. The difference between the success and failure lies in the "*attitude*" towards its customers. Most organizations have an extremely faulty customer centered system. They are not open to customer suggestions and more often than not, they

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do not provide the customer with a proper avenue to vent his ideas. This often leads to unhappy customers and eventually, their loss.

CRM facilitates growth in that it aids the reduction of costs and the increased availability of information to the organization - that can be used according to customer information requirements. The customer centered strategy that provides information on potential customers boosts the marketing function by providing the marketing department with a clear idea of what the customer needs are and enables them to work accordingly. Thus, the benefits of CRM are enormous. The specific advantages derived through CRM are quoted below:

- ✿ Better customer service;
- ✿ Gaining competitive edge ;
- ✿ Constant supply of vital customer data;
- ✿ Enhancing customer satisfaction;
- ✿ Easy handling of routine tasks;
- ✿ Teamwork within the organization;
- ✿ Improves the communication process;
- ✿ Makes awareness of customer needs and deal with them in the right manner;
- ✿ Ensures discipline in the organization;
- ✿ Continuous monitoring of performance.

In view of the above, organizations are now trying to create a wonderful experience for their customers and are focusing more on the experience that their customers have, than on what is being sold to him. This stems from a deep desire on the customers' part to have a good relationship with the company. Organizations are now capitalizing on this need and are realizing the importance of CRM applications.

APPLICATION OF CRM

CRM's application includes a wide range of sectors ranging from business, education, healthcare and areas as offbeat as relationship marketing and knowledge management. The presence of CRM shall be felt in the following significant sectors:

- ✿ Healthcare;
- ✿ Financial Services;
- ✿ Manufacturing;
- ✿ Real Estate;
- ✿ Retail;
- ✿ Travel & Tourism;
- ✿ Banking;
- ✿ Automobile and;
- ✿ Insurance

CRM IN THE HEALTH CARE INDUSTRY

In today's world, the medical sector is finding the need to know more and more about their current and prospective patients. The Health Care sector is now opting for Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in its daily application. CRM in Health Care consists of a wide array of software products that help healthcare organizations to provide quality service to their clients. The Pharmaceuticals & Life Science sector is unlike any other and requires large amounts of data and information processing. CRM provides for this with its ability to store volumes of customer data. The range of services in CRM offered in health care sector consists of -

- ✿ Strategic Planning;
- ✿ Communication;
- ✿ Consulting;
- ✿ Relationship with physicians;
- ✿ Campaign Management;
- ✿ Database Construction;
- ✿ Predictive Segmentation;

CRM in healthcare supports the call centre by providing customer service representatives with essential customer information. This helps the healthcare sector to access critical information and deliver value to customers. CRM solutions succeed in transforming healthcare organizations into customer-centric efficient providers of health care. The healthcare industry has realized the importance of quality of service. CRM industry leaders now offer customer relationship management solutions to help healthcare organizations deal with customer service issues while delivering excellent health services.

CRM in the healthcare sector caters to the largest healthcare organizations' promotion and customer service demands. CRM Healthcare helps to forecast business and increases the reputation through excellent customer approaches. It facilitates revenue and enables the sharing of information across teams. In addition, CRM helps Health Care organizations plan and carry out medical management campaigns. Health care CRM software increases the efficiency of call centers. It also assists the initiatives of medical management and facilitates the collection of information regarding physicians, hospitals and supplementary medical providers. It maintains secure and comprehensive information regarding physician profiles that can be used by marketing departments.

INDIANS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS HEALTHCARE SERVICES

Majority of the Indians make use of medical and healthcare services only on being diagnosed with some medical problem or illness. Periodic or preventive check ups and tests are not very much prevalent. The consumer spending on health in India is predictably quite low because of low incomes, but what is significant is that spending on health services as a percentage of total spending is also quite low. This is partially because of free medical services provided by the government, but also due to lack of awareness and level of importance given to health care. Of course, because of scarcity of resources, a person would tend to spend larger portion of whatever limited resources he has on food, clothing and shelter. Therefore, majority of people do not plan for medical care in their household budget.

A major characteristic of Indians regarding health services is a sharp sexual difference in availing of these services. The reporting of illness is almost double for males as compared to females. This is not because of better health status of females in India; rather it is because perceived need for medical aid is much smaller for females as compared to males.

TYPE OF HEALTH SERVICES

The health services offered in India broadly comes under the following two sectors:

a) Government

b) Private

The Government (both Central and State) has a network of institutions at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. These include sub-centres, primary health centres, community health centres, rural hospitals and dispensaries in rural areas, sub-divisional and divisional hospitals, medical college hospitals and specialized hospitals. However, the government is facing a lot of problems in attracting doctors to rural areas. Overall also, the Government facilities are not adequate as per the population needs and most of the people who have a reasonable level of purchasing power, make use of private health care services.

One important government health care scheme is the Employee State Insurance Scheme designed for industrial workers. The scheme is mainly financed by contributions from employers and employees in the implemented areas. The State governments also contribute 12.5% of the expenditure on medical care within the prescribed limits. The scheme provides both medical benefits as well as cash benefits like sickness, disablement and maternity.

During the last couple of decades, a lot of private nursing homes, diagnostic centres and speciality hospitals have come up in urban areas, with their major market being middle and high income group people. The last decade has also witnessed the emergence of '*Corporate Hospitals*' in India. Apollo Hospitals, a ₹ 10.24 crore public limited venture opened at Madras on September 18, 1983 and has the distinction of being the first corporate hospital in the country. Lately, a lot many public limited companies have been set up in this area.

Medical care is now emerging as a big industry in the private sector. This has resulted in some competition and better availability of advanced technologies/supplier specialities, which were so far available in western countries only. Since large investments are required for setting up of such hospitals, it was beyond the scope of an individual or a small group of individuals and the most viable alternative was to have corporate hospitals. However, most of these recent developments are again mainly targeted at middle and high income groups.

HEALTH CARE IN ANDHRA PRADESH

When the whole world is talking about general economic slowdown, the healthcare sector has yet again proved that it is recession proof with more investments in the pipeline. The industry needs to work out ways for a more efficient public-private participatory engagement -with a focus on bringing down cost, while also ensuring quality care and sustaining existing projects. Also, technology has become a key differentiator in offering quality healthcare. However, this comes with a cost, which makes it difficult for people at the bottom of the pyramid. However, certain schemes were launched by the Andhra Pradesh Government to offer quality Medicare with PPP model, and Arogyasri to quote as an example. The Government, which has earmarked about ₹ 700 crore for healthcare through PPP model, is pumping in about ₹ 300 crore to support healthcare with supply of medicines. These initiatives are being complemented by 104 services to offer primary healthcare at the doorstep of people living in the rural parts of the State. Around 500 fully equipped medical vans would go to the doorstep of rural households offering women and children quality medicare. These vans would be connected to central servers, gathering information in real time.

MARKETING OF HEALTH SERVICES

The Indian Health Care Market is more of a seller's market. The demand far outstrips the supply. As in case with any other product or industry in a sellers' market, the '*marketing*' aspect in Indian Healthcare market is given a low level of importance. Some of the organizations which have started giving a thought to marketing are also limited to the '*sales*' aspect or '*image building*' exercise and not to the total marketing approach.

However, there will be some changes in the near future towards acceptance of marketing activities as an essential part of health care organizations, though not as much as in developed countries (where demand/supply conditions and purchasing powers are totally different from ours). The major reasons necessitating a shift towards marketing approach in India are:

- ✿ Intense competition;
- ✿ More consumer awareness;
- ✿ Setting up of Corporate Hospitals;
- ✿ Increasing purchasing power;
- ✿ Need to attract limited available specialists

The marketing of health services, as they exist today can be broadly classified into two categories:

a) Social (non-profit)

b) Commercial

✿ **Social:** This is primarily being done by the Government. The major promotional efforts made by the Government have been in the areas of:

- ✿ Family planning;
- ✿ Child immunization;
- ✿ General awareness regarding healthcare and family welfare.

✿ **Commercial:** This includes individual/institutional promotion like advertising about the facilities and equipments available in the nursing homes/hospitals. Big hospitals and nursing homes also enter into agreements with public and private sector companies located in that area for treatment of their employees. Hospitals also come out with health insurance schemes and discount facilities for people who become members of the scheme. However, generally speaking, not much has been done so far for marketing of health services because of gaps in demand and supply. But with the coming up of big hospitals, there is some change in the scenario. Advertisements of big hospitals in print media are not an uncommon site these days. Efforts are also being made by hospitals to encourage people to have preventive healthcare by having regular check ups. This segment which has so far not been fully exploited is being aggressively advertised by some organizations. Some sort of market surveys are also being carried out by big hospitals. However, not much is being done in the areas of market research, forecasting, consumer analysis, etc.

EXECUTION OF QUESTIONNAIRE

One of the basic tools of marketing research is a questionnaire. The questionnaire serves as a useful guide for communication processes and is used with the survey process. The questionnaire helps to recognize tastes, preferences and perceptions of various people, so that strategies for future product/service promotions can be made.

Hence, in the present study, to extract the required information and data for achieving the main objectives, a questionnaire with relevant questions to the targeted respondents was designed and the same was executed. All the 10 selected respondent organizations: NRI Hospitals, Nagarjuna Hospitals, Dr. Ramesh Cardiac and Multi-specialty Hospitals, Pinnamaneni Care Hospitals, Manipal Hospitals, Safe Hospitals, Andhra Hospitals, Global Medical Centre, Usha Cardiac Centre and Help Hospitals paid their attention towards the survey.

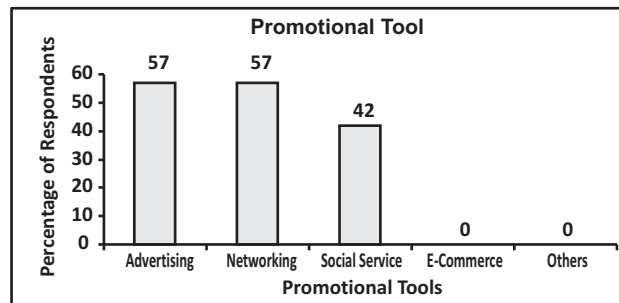
ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONSES

A thorough analysis of the data and information using statistical tools, viz., tables, charts and graphs was made for more clear understanding of the problem. The tables, charts were followed by interpretation.

Table 1: Promotion of Health Services

S. No	Promotional Tool	No. of Respondents	% of Response
1	Advertising	4	57
2	Networking	4	57
3	Social Service	3	42
4	E-Commerce	0	0
5	Others	0	0

Chart 1 : Promotional Tools

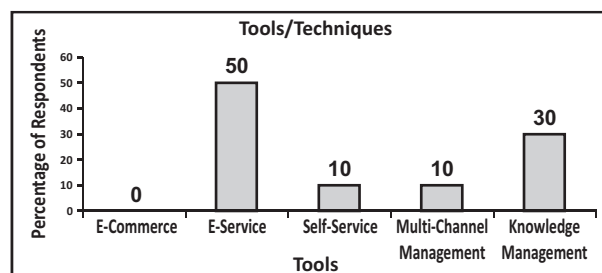


As can be viewed from the Table 1 and Chart 1, Advertising and Networking (with 57% each) are used as the main tools for promoting health services. Social service is also a significant promotional tool for health services with 42%.

Table 2: Tools / Techniques Used For CRM

S. No	Tools / Techniques	No. of Respondents	% of Response
1	E-Commerce	0	0
2	E-Service	5	50
3	Self-Service	1	10
4	Multi-Channel Management	1	10
5	Knowledge Management	3	30

Chart 2: Tools/ Techniques



From the Table 2 and Chart 2, it is evident that as a CRM implementation tool, E-Service (50%) occupies the top position. The knowledge management process is also a significant tool with 30%. The other tools i.e., Self-Service and Multi-Channel Management are also used to some extent (10% each).

Table 3: Hospitals Benefited By CRM

S. No	Benefits	Cumulative Value	Mean Value
1	Increase in number of patients	38	3.8
2	Repeated patients	32	3.2
3	Increase in number of services	44	4.4
4	Increase in the revenue	28	2.8
5	Scope for new services	42	4.2
6	Enhancing service quality	38	3.8
7	Broadened market access	20	2.0
8	Attracting new patients through networks	26	3.6

(Mean Value of more than 2.5 is above the average)

Chart 3: Benefits of CRM

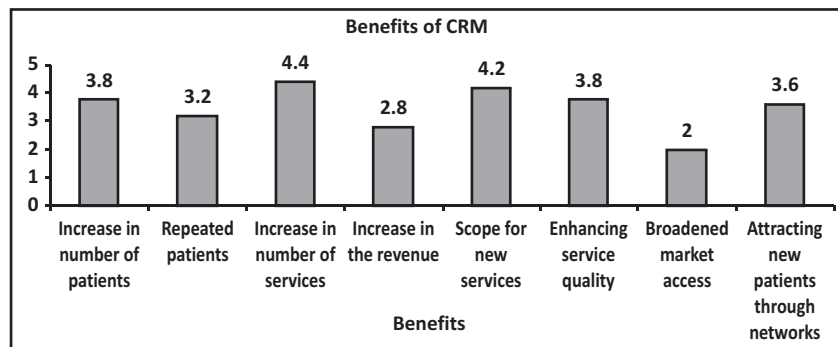


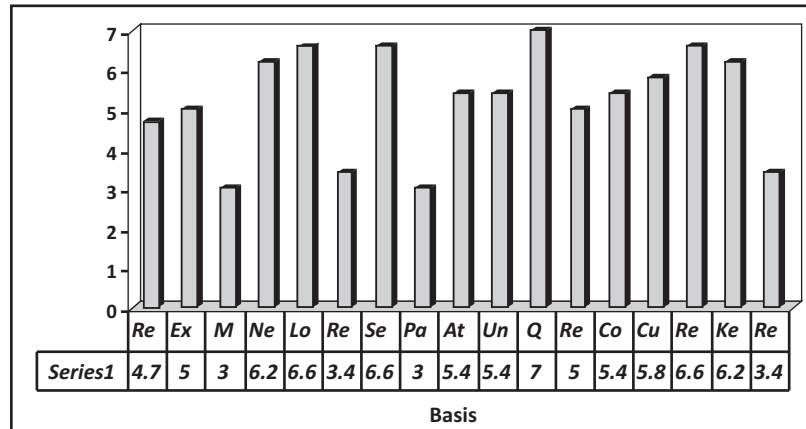
Table 4: Basis For Evaluation Of CRM

S. No	Basis For Evaluation	Cumulative Value	Mean Value
1	Revenue	47	4.7
2	Expenses	50	5.0
3	Market Share	30	3.0
4	New Patients	62	6.2
5	Loyalty Shifting	66	6.6
6	Reduction of expenses	34	3.4
7	Service Time	66	6.6
8	Patients complaints	30	3.0
9	Attitude	54	5.4
10	Understanding expectations	54	5.4
11	Quality Perceptions	70	7.0
12	Reliability	50	5.0
13	Communication	54	5.4
14	Customisation	58	5.8
15	Recognition	66	6.6
16	Keeping Promises	62	6.2
17	Retention	34	3.4

(Mean Value of more than 3.5 is above the average)

With regards to the benefits gained through CRM for the corporate hospitals, the data depicted in the Table 3 and the corresponding Chart 3 reveals some interesting facts. Out of the 8 specific benefits, 6 benefits are common to all the organizations. The main benefit is in increase in the number of services with a mean value of 4.4 on a 5-point scale and the least being broadened market access with a mean value of 2.0, increase in patients' number and repeated patients benefits are also obtained with 3.8 and 3.2 mean values respectively.

Chart 4: Basis of Evaluation of CRM Efforts

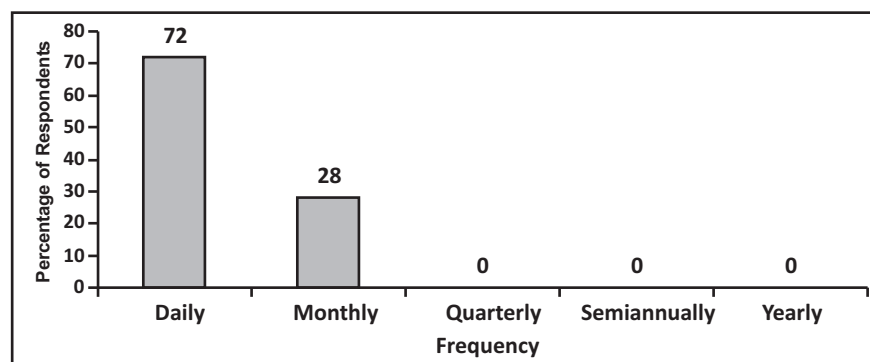


With regard to the basis for evaluation of CRM efforts (Table 4 and Chart 4), 17 bases are taken into consideration. Expectations of the patients, is the main criteria for evaluation among all, with 7.0 mean value on a 7 point scale. Market share and patients' complaints are given the least preference with 3.0 mean values each.

Table 5: Frequency Of Tracking Patient Satisfaction

S. No	Frequency	No. of Respondents	% of Response
1	Daily	5	72
2	Monthly	7	28
3	Quarterly	0	0
4	Semiannually	0	0
5	Yearly	0	0

Chart 5 : Frequency of Tracking Patient Satisfaction

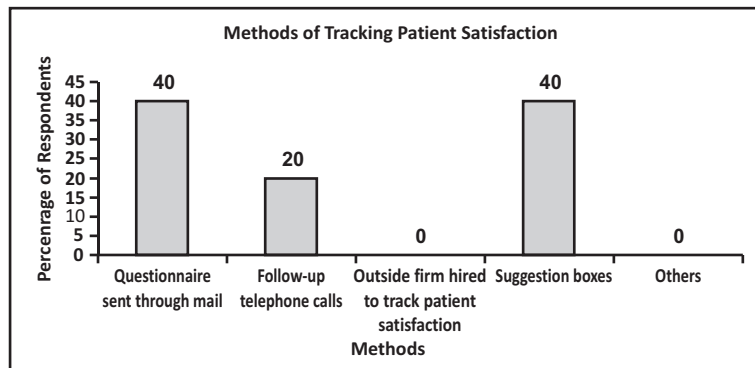


As shown in the Table 5 as well as Chart 5, the frequency of tracking patient satisfaction is 'Daily' with 72% of the responses. 'Monthly' tracking is also took place, with 28% responses.

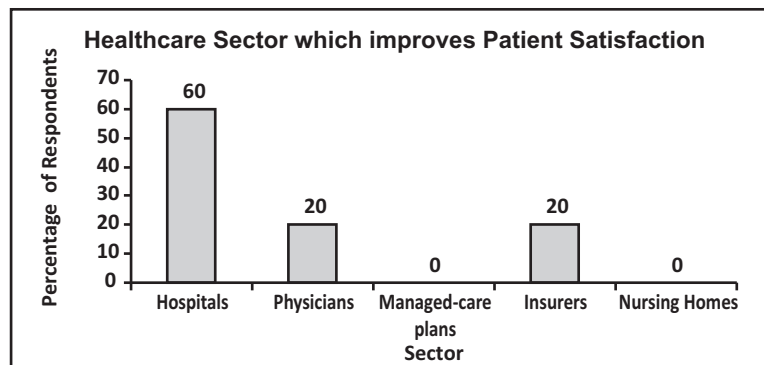
It is clear from Table 6 and Chart 6, that the method of tracking patient satisfaction has been mainly through questionnaire and suggestion boxes with 40% response each. The follow-up through telephone calls is also a method used with 20% of the responses.

Table 6: Method Of Tracking Patient Satisfaction

S. No	Method	No. of Respondents	% of Response
1	Questionnaire sent through mail	4	40
2	Follow-up telephone calls	2	20
3	Outside firm hired to track patient satisfaction	0	0
4	Suggestion boxes	4	40
5	Others	0	0

Chart 6: Methods of Tracking Patient Satisfaction**Table 7: Which Sector Of Health Care Industry Improves Patient Satisfaction?**

S. No	Sector	No. of Respondents	% of Response
1	Hospitals	6	60
2	Physicians	2	20
3	Managed-care plans	0	0
4	Insurers	2	20
5	Nursing Homes	0	0
6	Out patient providers	0	0

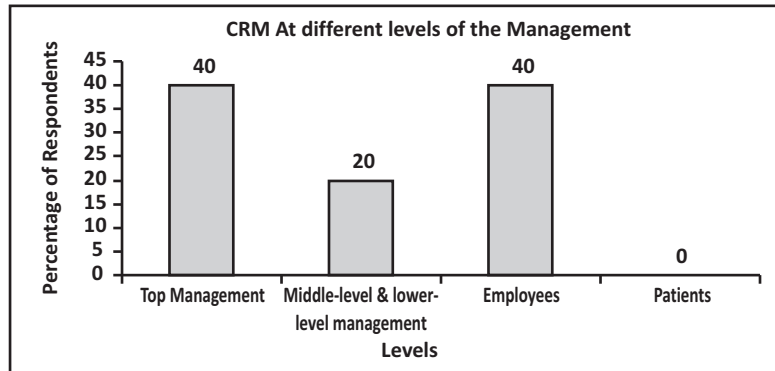
Chart 7: Healthcare Sector Which Improves Patient Satisfaction

Regarding the key role played by the specific sector in the healthcare industry to improve patient satisfaction (Table 7 and Chart 7), the first slot goes to '*Hospitals*' with 60% response. At the same time, Physicians and Insurers have also played a significant role with 20% response each. The remaining sectors like nursing homes, out-patient providers have nil impact.

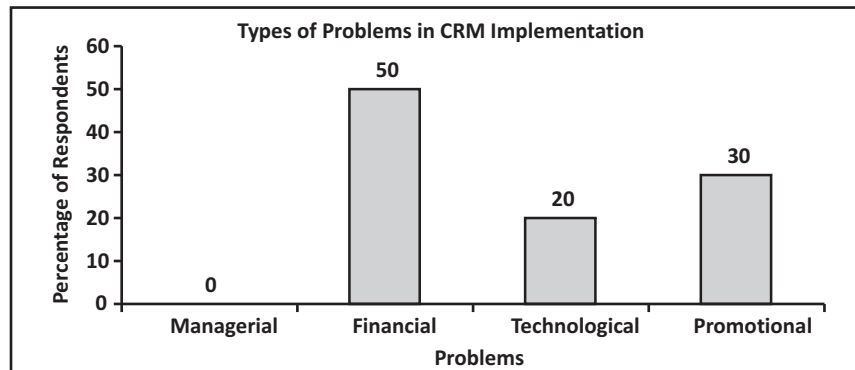
In the process of implementing CRM in the organization (Table 8 and Chart 8), the top management personnel and employees have been playing a key role with 40% of the responses going in their favour. The role played by the middle level and lower level management only received 20% of the responses.

Table 8: CRM At Different Levels Of Management

S. No	Option	No. of Respondents	% of Response
1	Top Management	4	40
2	Middle-level & lower-level management	2	20
3	Employees	4	40
4	Patients	0	0

Chart 8: CRM At Different Levels Of The Management**Table 9: Types Of Problems In CRM Implementation**

S. No	Type of Problem	No. of Respondents	% of Response
1	Managerial	0	0
2	Financial	5	50
3	Technological	2	20
4	Promotional	3	30

Chart 9: Types of Problems In CRM Implementation

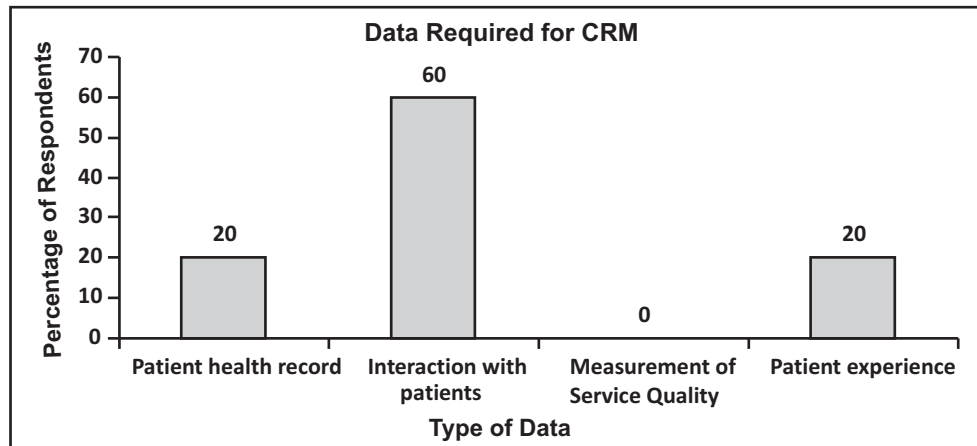
The organizations (Table 9 and Chart 9) faced various problems in CRM implementation, among these, the financial problems were main - receiving 50 % of the responses. Promotional problems were also significant, receiving 30% of the responses. At the same time, organizations were facing technological problems, which received 20% of the

Table 10: Data Required For CRM Implementation

S. No	Type of Data	No. of Respondents	% of Response
1	Patient health record	2	20
2	Interaction with patients	6	60
3	Measurement of Service Quality	0	0
4	Patient experience	2	20

responses.

Chart 10 : Data Required For CRM



According to the views of the respondents (Table 10 and Chart 10) regarding the data required for the CRM implementation in the hospitals, the main source was interaction with patients with 60% of the responses. The patients' health record and patients' experience were also significant sources with 20% responses each.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

An insight into the major issues of healthcare sector reveals the fact that promotion of healthcare services is always a crucial task. Since the qualitative assessment plays a key role always, it would be a challenging task to maintain good customer relationship management in the healthcare industry. The scenario has been changing with the emergence of corporate, super-specialty, networking hospitals. In the process of marketing, health services has been a well recognized fact and CRM plays a pivotal role in the same. Considering the Indian socio - demographic profile, healthcare services and their promotion includes a number of delicate issues.

In India, where medical care infrastructure is inadequate compared to the requirements, proper attention has to be given to educate people about the nature of illnesses, the facilities available, importance of healthcare and hazards of ignoring these aspects. An educated citizen would mean better utilization of available facilities as well as prevention of many diseases, thereby easing pressure on the scarce resources.

With regards to the specific marketing implications of CRM in Indian healthcare industry, the following observations are worth mentioning:

- 1) Most of all the corporate hospitals are viewing CRM as an effective tool for promoting their healthcare services.
- 2) Social service in various forms has also been given much importance in this regard.
- 3) The main intention behind the focus on CRM is to procure customer loyalty and to attract more and more new customers and also to retain them in the long run.
- 4) In order to derive the real advantages from CRM, majority of the corporate hospitals expressed the view that the committed support from the top level management is mandatory. At the same time, people at the middle and lower level should have proper intention in implementing the same.
- 5) It has been observed that the customer satisfaction level has increased abnormally due to the implementation of CRM in the healthcare sector.
- 6) The information and data required for initiation as well as effective execution of CRM in hospitals has been mainly procured through direct interaction with patients, followed by meticulous maintenance of patient health records.
- 7) In view of the low literacy rate, slum living and large population growth, proper attention has to be paid for primary healthcare facilities and appointment of qualified doctors.
- 8) The Government and all other social service agencies shall also advocate the Indian system of medicine viz., Homeopathy, Naturopathy, *Unani*, *Ayurveda*, etc.
- 9) Another significant lapse as far as the Indian healthcare service is concerned is lack of proper preventive measures. Hence, a lot of effort is needed in this regard.

10) The health condition of females in India is still very poor. This can be attributed to the lack of proper education. In the CRM implementation process, the corporate hospitals should take a special note of this point.

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