

A Customer Oriented Sustainability Approach in Healthcare

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Abstract

Sustainability is now being considered as a very important topic. As energy resources are continuing to deplete, every part of the world seeks to develop their sustainability. While developing the sustainability factors in a hospital, meeting customer satisfaction and focusing on patient needs are equally important to achieve the overall sustainability goal of the hospital. The purpose of this research paper is to identify the customer oriented sustainability factors in the healthcare sector. The existing works of literature research on sustainability has mainly focused on environmental and business operational (economic) sustainability and it lacks a view of customer oriented sustainability to achieve the overall goal of the healthcare service organization. Healthcare providers have realized the importance of offering quality service to patients and seek to balance the resources and needs of patients as part of sustainability practices.

The customer orientation is a philosophy and approach that guide the healthcare managers to formulate the strategies in such a way that the firm can offer maximum possible satisfaction to target customers. This study explores the scope of customer oriented sustainability practices in healthcare by systematically examining the research studies conducted in healthcare. The review is focused on concepts of customer oriented dimensions of sustainability practices in healthcare. Based on the identified sustainability research and practices, future research insights are proposed as a conceptual model that reflects the scope of customer oriented sustainability practices in healthcare setup. This could enhance the research of sustainability beyond traditional environmental and economic dimensions.

Keywords: *Healthcare, Sustainable healthcare, Innovation, Customer oriented sustainability*

Introduction

The word sustainability has been used to indicate a variety of problems, even though its introduction to management research was through the issue of environmental degradation caused by the business sector. Today, the meaning of the term sustainability cannot be restricted to environmental wellbeing alone; rather it has to be extended to accommodate a set of other aspects such as the wellbeing of the customers also by having an approach of continuous improvement of the services and cost effectiveness, in the provision of forming service excellence for business sustainability.

As service organizations are continuing to grow including healthcare, the challenges are also growing in terms of customer expectations on quality of service, cost of operations, growing competition as well as strict environmental regulations. Healthcare organizations are continuously searching for best quality and low operating expenses while providing healthcare services. Sustainability for patient is very important for creating competitiveness. Thus, sustainability in the healthcare system is imperative for having multi-dimensional approaches in the areas of product, and delivery of healthcare services to customer. Sustainability has emerged as an important organizational strategy and organizations are trying to develop new ways to include sustainability into various functional areas.

Thus, healthcare providers have begun to incorporate the principles of sustainability. The existing works of literature research on sustainability has mainly focused on environmental and business operational (economic) sustainability and it lacks a view of customer-oriented sustainability to achieve the overall goal of the healthcare service organization. So there is a strong need for research to expand the concept of sustainability beyond this traditional approach and to introduce framework to measure customer orientation factors also. Following are the objectives of research.

1. To identify factors of sustainable healthcare?
2. To identify customer orientation factors for sustainable healthcare?
3. To introduce a framework to measure customer oriented sustainability factors in the healthcare sector.

This study intends to fill research gaps identified in the available literature on sustainability in healthcare and this study referred only to articles in which investigation on healthcare sustainability was the main agenda of the research paper.

Literature Review on Sustainability in Healthcare

A systematic literature search was conducted following systematic literature review (SLR) guidelines (Thome et al., 2016). Citation database Google Scholar and several academic databases viz. Elsevier, Taylor & Francis, John-Wiley, Emerald, Springer, MEDLINE, Research Gate, Inderscience, MDPI, and Harvard Business Review (HBR) were searched for studies relevant to this context. Also United Nations (UN) and World Health Organization (WHO) websites were searched for relevant articles.

Sustainability in Healthcare

Environmental, economic and social dimensions.

International Institution of Sustainable Development (IISD) defines corporate sustainability as “adopting business strategies and activities that meet the needs of the enterprise and its stakeholders today while protecting, sustaining, and enhancing the human and natural resources that will be needed in the future” (IISD, 2002). This definition has given more importance of meeting the needs of social and non-social stakeholders and balancing the economic, environmental, and social dimensions of organization performance.

The healthcare industry practices environmental sustainability (Marimuthu et al., 2016), like the adoption of integrated design of healthcare facilities, reduction and efficient management of medical waste and sustainable procurement. Efficient waste management ensures proper hygiene and safety of healthcare workers and communities. Reducing waste in operations also helps to save operating costs.

Environmental efficiency often translates into economic efficiency to create value for stakeholders (Messelbeck et al., 1999).

Green energy like solar, tidal, wind etc, pollution control related to emissions to air, land and water initiatives, and transport by use of electric vehicles, prevention of waste by having lean principles, sustainable facilities design (Franco et al., 2017) as already gained momentum in healthcare industry.

Economic sustainability refers to practices that support long-term economic growth and economic aspect covers strategies that promote cost savings, profits, research, and development. Under this dimension of sustainability, most researchers have concentrated on the financial self-sufficiency (Giusti et al., 2020).

According to an All India Management Association (AIMA) conference note, innovations could be a way forward for people to get quality care at a cost that the country can afford. Innovation is increasingly being seen as the potential to contribute to fundamental changes towards sustainability (Gupta et al., 2011; Hovlid et al., 2012; Aquino et al., 2018; Shaw, 2017).

The sustainable health system guides optimal and rational health and health outcomes without negotiating the capacity of future generations to look after their health and personal healthy life. Further, the sustainable health system is complicated by nature and having multiple stakeholders with their capacities to gather and distribute scarce resources in the long term through which current and future health needs of individuals can be fulfilled (Prada et al 2014).

Healthcare system is incorporating sustainability in to their business models on the basis of social responsibility and obligation to society. There are so many factors that are driving sustainability in healthcare system. As per Paper et al., (2012), the main driving factors for sustainability in healthcare system are increasing cost of operations, government policy, increasing healthcare education, raising sustainability concerns in societies, shortage of natural resources, needs of patients etc.

Transformations are occurring in the environment namely pollution, global warming, dearth of natural and environmental resources and these are forcing healthcare system to discover various means to include sustainable healthcare practices in all type of operations (Paper et al 2012).

Education and increasing awareness among all members of society are through various programmes on efficient use of natural and environmental resources by healthcare organizations and reduction of pollution through sustainable practices in its various activities (Yang et al 2009).

Corporate sustainability is increasingly popular and adopting in most of healthcare organizations and it includes development of healthcare employees, innovations, organizational climate, social responsibility and moral and ethical behaviors of employees which are moved towards adoption of sustainable practices in healthcare services (Kantabutra, 2011).

Increasing cost of healthcare services has compelled healthcare organizations to concentrate on sustainable healthcare practices in order to decrease medical expenses (Hudson and Vissing, 2013).

Leadership should be developed for sustainability practices in healthcare system and Effective strategies must be created and implemented in the most efficient ways for sustainability practices in healthcare system (Parsons and Cornett, 2011).

Participation of healthcare employees should be encouraged in decision making process for adopting healthcare sustainable practices. Learning assessment for them must be increased. Healthcare

organizations should provide conducive atmosphere for their employees for steadily improving quality of healthcare services.

Programmes must be conducted regularly in order to enhance awareness on sustainable health practices among all stakeholders and encourage employees to involve in adopting sustainable practices (Dunphy, 2013).

In addition, motivational programmes and trainings and materials should be given adequately to them in a continuous manner for sustainability of healthcare organizations (Higuchi et al 2013).

Healthcare system must give more attention to advanced healthcare technologies and innovations which will enhance its sustainability in each and every aspect of healthcare sustainable practices (Doyle et al 2013).

Psychological and social research should be conducted among healthcare professionals to comprehend their attitude, culture and behaviour which will be required for improving sustainability of healthcare system (McGain and Naylor, 2014).

Collaboration and cooperation among various healthcare professionals should be increased to help healthcare organizations to deal challenges in sustainability of healthcare system (Ramirez et al 2013).

Innovation is a driving factor for sustainability in healthcare. Innovation in health sector is consisting of new products, services and modern methods to carry out healthcare practice and or advanced technologies (Lansisalmi et al 2006).

Patients are expected to improve their health conditions or reducing sufferings of various diseases. Innovation is the invention, improvement and or development of organization, healthcare business models for creating value addition to patients and getting financial benefits to healthcare organizations, innovation is an efficient execution of modern and advanced ideas that offer value addition to all stakeholders of healthcare organizations (Varkey et al 2008).

Innovation may be disruptive and non-disruptive (Moore, 2004) and non-disruptive is also described as evolutionary, incremental, supportive and linear to enhance something which is already existed, but, it opens new ways to find solutions for existing problems. Disruptive are also denoted as nonlinear, revolutionary and radical (Govindarajan, 2006) that disturb older system, generating new players and providing values to all stakeholders which adopt innovations in healthcare practices.

Innovations in healthcare practices are occurring in three levels such as product, process and structure (Varkey et al 2008). Patients are paying for products and services of healthcare organizations. Processes are innovations coming out from the production or method of delivery of healthcare services and innovation may change process in production and it will increase value addition for stakeholders. Structure is influencing external and internal facilities and makes new business models for healthcare organizations. Thus, innovation in healthcare system is the process of introduction of modern idea, product, and service, process to improve medical treatments, education, diagnosis, prevention, outcomes and research in the long run for enhancing safety, services, outcomes, efficiency and expenditure in the health system.

Further, there are three kinds of innovations which significantly contribute to sustainability of healthcare system (Herzlinger, 2006). The first one is modifications in the ways through which patients buy and use

healthcare services. The second one is using modern technologies to develop new treatments and products to enhance services of healthcare system. The third one is creating new business models by considering horizontal and vertical integrations of different activities and organizations.

Researchers have addressed social dimension of sustainability issues of healthcare such as access, cost and quality of healthcare etc. for the people and community such as home based tele-medicine, advanced healthcare technologies like minimal to non-invasive surgeries with monitoring online and facilitating alarm systems (Ferrando et al., 2017) using internet of things (IOT) technologies (Presti et al., 2019; Turcu et al., 2013; Celdran et al., 2018).

Several researchers have contributed to the exploration of Environmental, Economic and social sustainability dimensions, but not much attention has been given to customers while having sustainability approaches.

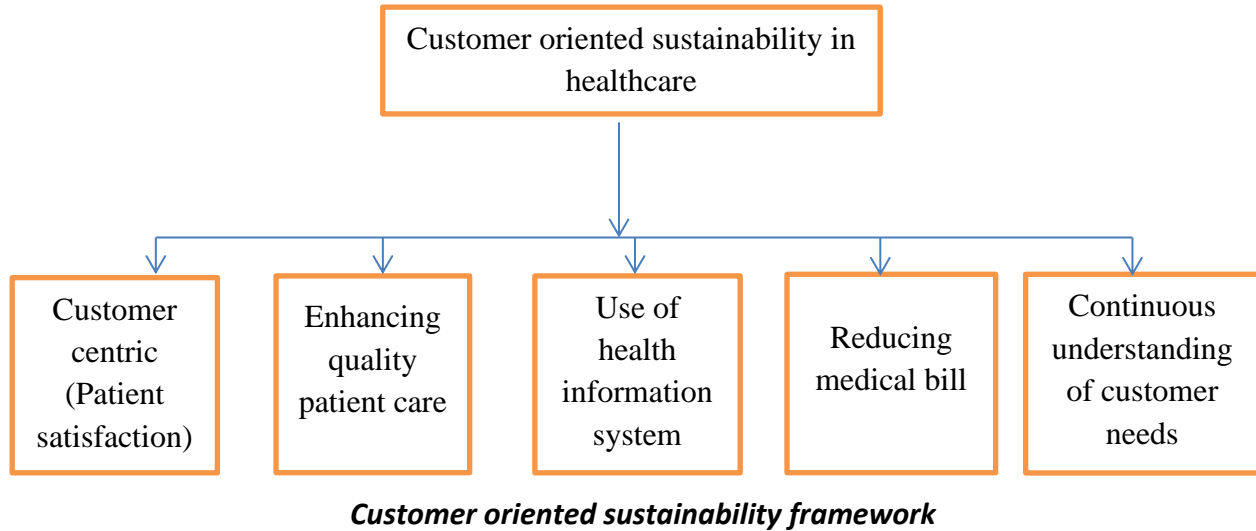
Customer Oriented Sustainability Approach in Healthcare

The term "customer orientation" is pervasively used in the marketing literature. This has been used as a basis for designing and planning an organizational strategy and to describe a type of organizational orientation where customer needs are the driving force (Saura et al., 2005).

Healthcare organizations have realized the significance of providing superior quality healthcare services to patients and are balancing the requirements of patients and resources as component of sustainability practices (Faezipour and Ferreira, 2013). Furthermore, healthcare organizations are using innovations and advanced technologies for providing best treatments to customers and they have also incorporated health information system and e-health services (Coiera and Hovenga, 2007).

Information and communication technologies are also guiding health care providers for sustainable healthcare services as they are helping for increasing service and operational efficiencies, making tools and techniques for sustainability and modifying and improving products and services (Coiera and Hovenga, 2007). Satisfaction and happiness of patients are very critical measures for sustainability of healthcare services and system that is highly and very closely associated with improvement in quality of healthcare services, decreased medical expenses and fulfilling anticipation of customers (Chandra et al 2013).

Customer oriented sustainability practices should be an essential part of strategic business plan for healthcare organizations. Based on the investigation conducted, this study found that Customer oriented sustainability practices in hospital's operation can be subdivided into five categories, below figure reflects the framework.



Customer centric (Patient satisfaction): Customer is the focal point for all decisions related to delivering products, services and experiences to create patient satisfaction and loyalty.

Enhancing quality of patient care: It is the degree to which health services for patients increase the likelihood of desired health outcomes. For example creating an information technology tool strategy like e-health.

Use of health information system: Information technology is important to direct health organizations towards sustainability since it can help to increase efficiency, create tools for sustainability and redesign products into services. It can provide patients the ability to communicate effectively and immediately with their hospital service providers. This facility can provide patient access to information that is important and useful for them. For example like patient portals, remote patient monitoring etc.

Reducing medical bill: From patient perspectives, creating an option to know their need and deciding based on their choice, example like deciding between imported implant Vs Indigenous implant.

Continuous understanding of customer needs: Having a facility/provision to understand the needs of patients continuously through feedback forms or post service follow-ups or through personalized interactions etc.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper appraises that the sustainability in healthcare system is involving the customer oriented sustainability factors for constantly improving quality of healthcare services and reducing cost. Beyond environmental and operational sustainability, focusing with a customer centered approach will have a greater contribution for the healthcare providers to remain sustainable in business.

As service excellence in healthcare context is the ability of the provider to consistently meet and manage patient expectations, this paper presents the preliminary findings from a systematic review of literature on the sustainability of the healthcare sector for service excellence formation that centered on enhancing the human life quality. The study identifies a gap in integrating the customer oriented sustainability practices into healthcare management. This study described that the importance of sustainability in

healthcare involves balancing of customer oriented key factors in its operating process: environment concerns, the needs of patients also as to continuously improve the quality and reduce cost. This study extends the statement made by the researcher that sustainable healthcare combines quality patient care and minimizing environmental impact (Jameton & McGuire, 2002). One of the future suggestions, which we could immediately identify, is about including the scope of sustainability in healthcare beyond environmental sustainability into customer based sustainability for enhancing organizational excellence and high quality of service.

Implications and limitations of the Study

There is a gap in the literature while addressing the sustainability in healthcare. This research aimed to fill the gap by introducing a new framework of customer orientation factors to achieve the overall sustainability goal. Healthcare decision makers must design their strategies by aligning customer orientation sustainability factors as shown in this research.

This study is limited to identifying the main customer orientation factors. Future research should focus on sub criteria's under each of these identified main criteria's in healthcare research, so that healthcare providers can measure the sustainability by considering all the criteria's.

Further scope of Research

Further scope is research can be done for identifying the sub criteria's under each main factors of customer oriented sustainability in healthcare sector. The proposed framework can be tested using formal research methods and also a comparison of healthcare providers in the context of measuring customer oriented sustainability can be done.

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