

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Health system reforms and implementation of the universal health coverage scheme result in changing of both health care structures and services in Thailand. Primary care unit (PCU) was established to entitle all Thais to have fundamental rights to access to standard and efficient public health service. (1) Primary care unit plays an important role in holistic care in term of providing curative, promotive and preventive and rehabilitative care. It is the first level of contact of individual, family and community to the national health system, bringing health care as close as possible to the place where people live and work, and constitutes the first element of a continuing health care process. (2)

As an important primary care provider, primary care unit should be located close to the community. Increasing client loyalty to primary care units not only improves access to health care service but also decreases the expenditure of seeking care for patients that in turn, increases the efficiency of the health care system. In addition, if client loyalty is built, patients will obtain primary care service from primary care unit, it will decrease the crowd at hospitals which should provide secondary or tertiary care. Therefore, improving client loyalty is an important strategy that primary care providers should pay attention. Moreover, the importance of measuring patients' perceptions of quality is based on the theoretical premise that rising quality perceptions will positively influence patient satisfaction, which will in turn positively influence the willingness of the patient to return for treatment and so finally to influence utilization of the medical facility. Consistent use of a regular source of care is rooted in a formal or informal contact between the patient and his regular source of care and that it implies a sustained partnership, a climate of trust and a strong interpersonal relationship. Patients who have great confidence in their health care provider are more apt to adhere to the treatment plan and as a result, improving patient loyalty, and finally improving their health outcomes. (3-6).

Evaluation of factors influencing client loyalty to primary care unit is designed to assess service quality from service receiver perspective and identify factors influencing client loyalty. The results of this study will be proposed for improving health service provided by primary care unit to gain satisfaction of both providers and patients and meet standard and quality under the National Health Security Scheme.

Research Question

1. What are factors influencing client loyalty to primary care units in Muang District, Chonburi Province?
2. How is loyalty among clients of primary care units in Muang District, Chonburi Province?

Objectives

1. To measure the level of loyalty among clients of primary care units in Muang District, Chonburi Province
2. To identify factors influencing client loyalty to primary care units in Muang District, Chonburi Province

Hypothesis

1. There was a significant positive relationship between overall perceived service quality and client loyalty.
2. There was a significant positive relationship between perceived structure quality and client loyalty.
3. There was a significant positive relationship between perceived process quality and client loyalty.
4. There was a significant positive relationship between perceived outcome quality and client loyalty.
5. There was a significant positive relationship between positive emotions and client loyalty.
6. There was a significant negative relationship between negative emotions and client loyalty.

7. There was a significant negative relationship between accessibility factors and client loyalty.
8. There was a significant positive relationship between age and client loyalty.
9. There was a significant negative relationship between income and client loyalty.
10. There was a significant negative relationship between education and client loyalty.
11. There was a significant positive relationship between chronic disease and client loyalty.

Expected Benefits

The factors influencing client loyalty to primary care units will be proposed. These factors can be used for improving health service in primary care units to gain client loyalty and satisfaction of both service providers and clients.

Definition of Terms

Client loyalty was utilization intention, positive word-of-mouth, low price sensitivity and low complaining behavior of primary care unit client.

Perceived service quality was client's judgment of health service obtained from primary care unit regarding structure quality, process quality and outcome quality.

Perceived structure quality was client's judgment of material resources, human resources and operational system related to health care providing.

Material resources were facilities and equipments related to providing of health care in primary care unit.

Human resources meant the number and type of health care provider at primary care unit.

Operational system was the way a health care system was set up, consisting of operating hour and methods of obtaining health care service.

Perceived process quality was client's judgment of health service delivered by provider consisting of attitudes, behaviors and expertise of service provider

Attitudes were concerning friendly, willingness to provide care and understand client's need of primary care unit health care provider.

Behaviors were the ways that health care provider behaved toward client.

Expertise was abilities of primary care unit health care personnel to solve clients' health problems, to inform client or to answer client questions.

Perceived outcome quality was client's judgment of changes in health status that can be attributed to health care and changes in knowledge or behavior that may influence future health.

Health status changes were client's changes in health status which was a result of care received from primary care unit.

Knowledge changes were changes in knowledge acquired by clients or family member that may influence future care which was a result of care received from primary care unit.

Behavior changes were changes in the behavior of clients or family members that may influence future health which was a result of care received from primary care unit.

Positive emotions were happy, hopeful or positive surprised emotions of clients developed during a service experience.

Negative emotions were angry, depressed, guilty or humiliated emotions of clients developed during a service experience.

Accessibility factors were time and money used by client to obtain health service from primary care unit.

Conceptual Framework

