



Satisfaction of patients with physicians and nurses

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ABSTRACT

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BACKGROUND: *The patients' satisfaction survey provides data on patients' experiences of healthcare professionals at the Institute of Oncology Sremska Kamenica. This feedback provides us with valuable information where to focus improvement efforts. The main objective in this study was to explore level of satisfaction of patients with physicians and nurses and to provide information of patients' expectation of healthcare professionals.*

METHODS: *The data were collected from the patients of four different hospital departments using a Survey Questionnaire designed by the Institute of Public Health of Serbia and Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia. Eight items regarding physicians and nurses were selected from this questionnaire. Sample was every eligible patient discharged from the Institute of Oncology Sremska Kamenica, from 1 to 5 November 2004 (n = 65).*

RESULTS: *The findings confirm positive feedback of the most surveyed patients with healthcare professionals. However, the results showed different level of satisfaction of patients with physicians and nurses.*

CONCLUSION: *The survey results showed that patients had mostly positive level of satisfaction with physicians and nurses; these results can be used to prioritize patient-centered improvements in healthcare in our Institute.*

KEY WORDS: *Quality Indicators, Health Care; Patient Satisfaction; Medical Staff; Physicians; Nurses*

INTRODUCTION

As performance indicator, satisfaction of patient is a very important tool in the processing of monitoring and improving quality of health care services. Asking patients what they think about the care and treatment they have received present one approach to improve the quality of care. To get feedback from patients about their experiences with healthcare services and healthcare staff, many hospitals are carrying out surveys of patients who have recently used the health care services. Hospitals have many reasons for obtaining patient feedback. Views and opinions of the patients provide useful information about key aspects of health care service delivery. Hospitals can use the results to identify how their services can be improved for patients. Different types of information can be obtained from patient surveys. After discharge, patients may be asked to report their perceptions of what happened during their stay, rate their perceptions of the quality of care and service they received, or indicate how they were with the care and service (1). Behind factors which are appearing during patients' hospitalization, many other factors can influence to satisfaction of patient, such as level of education of patient, social standards, previous experience with healthcare providers, psychology factors, patients' needs and expectation, given explanation, their knowledge of healthcare, etc. The main objectives in this article were: to explore level of satisfaction of patients with physicians and nurses; to identify how healthcare services and processes can be improved for patients, and to use results from the survey for sharing with other hospitals for benchmarking purposes.

Measurement of satisfaction of patients in Serbia

In order to improve quality in healthcare in Serbia the Ministry of Health has set up an Explanation of monitoring of Quality in Healthcare. Measurement of patients' satisfaction is one of the quality indicators in this document (2). The first patients' satisfaction survey in Serbia was carried out in 2004. The Institute of Public Health of Serbia was the coordinator of the first national survey, which was carried out in primary care services, hospitals, stomatology care services, and specialized gynecology healthcare services. This year, the Institute of Public Health of Serbia has published reports, which summarize the key findings from the surveys and describe the experiences of patients of each of these services. These surveys provide important feedback about experience and satisfaction of patients of healthcare services.

World trend in measurement satisfaction of patients

Research on patient satisfaction can be traced back to the late 1960s (3). To date, most studies have focused on medical and economic criteria, but attempts have also been made to include the costumers' and patients' judgment about care that health services supply (4). The measurement satisfaction of the patients is identified as a priority in many developed countries.

The Department of Human Services has been measuring the satisfaction of patients with acute care in Victoria (Australia) since the early 1990s (5). The Victorian Patient Satisfaction Monitor (VPSM) present a continuous survey, with sampling being conducted either quar-

terly (A and B category hospital) or monthly (all smaller hospital) throughout each year. It is conducted using a mail-out, self-administered questionnaire, returned in a reply-paid envelope. They use different questionnaire instrument, which has been developed specially for the VPSM. The questions in this instrument are clustered into six key indices of care: access and admission, general patient information, treatment and related information, physical environment, complaints management, and discharge and follow-up. This new form allows the calibration of an Overall Care Index and its six component sub-indices (6).

In England and Wales, the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection (Healthcare Commission) has responsibility for the program of national patient surveys. The Healthcare Commission has carried out five national surveys asking the patients across England about their experiences of mental health, inpatient, ambulance, hospital care for children, and primary care services. The British National Healthcare Service (NHS) surveys advice center at Picker Institute Europe developed questionnaires and methodology (7). The domains of patient experience in inpatient survey (2002) are: prompt access, coordination of care, environment and facilities, information and education, involvement and choice, physical and emotional needs and respect, and dignity. They use scoring methodology. Higher scores reflect a more positive response about the quality of services received than lower scores (8).

Due to growing internationalization and increasing competition, International Hospital Federation (IHF) has identified that the hospitals are in need of better strategic and operational management tools to enhance improvements. In order to meet the needs of its members and the greater healthcare community IHF has initiated a global index, the International Patient Satisfaction Index (IPSI). IPSI will be the first global index focused on patient satisfaction. With IPSI, a global standard using best practice survey methodology will be established (9).

PATIENTS AND METHODS

The Institute of Oncology Sremska Kamenica has taken part in this national survey project and carried out a survey asking patients about their recent experiences during their last hospitalization in the Institute. Patients, who responded to the survey, rated physicians and nurses, as one of the key dimensions of their experiences with healthcare services.

The data were collected from the patients of four different hospital departments using a Survey Questionnaire designed from the Institute of Public Health of Serbia and the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia. Eight items regarding physicians and nurses were selected from this questionnaire. Sample consisted of patients discharged from the Institute of Oncology Sremska Kamenica, from 1 to 5 November 2004 ($n = 65$).

The patients were eligible to take part if they had at least one overnight stay in the hospital; they had to be at least 18 years old. We had identified a list of 116 eligible patients that were discharged from the Institute from 1-5 November 2004. However, 17 patients (14.66%) refused to participate in this survey. Ninety-nine patients were given a questionnaire, cover letter, and a reply-paid envelope, but only 65 patients completed it and returned it within two weeks. The response rate was 65.66%.

The data was analyzed by classical statistical tests using Microsoft Excel 2002: distribution of frequentation, index of structure, ponderous arithmetic median, variance, standard deviation, coefficient of variation, and standard error.

RESULTS

Characteristics of the respondents

The survey results showed that the mean age of respondents was 52 years old (range, 21-72 years); most of them were women (72%). The majority of respondents (40%) were pen-

sioners, and 77% respondents are married. Education level of our sample was: 38% of respondents finished elementary school, 34% high school, 22% had associate and bachelor's degrees, and 6% with vocational degrees. Near half the respondents had their own general practitioner who cares about their health status. Almost 57% reported that they were admitted in the hospital for medical treatment of cancer diseases, 22% were admitted because of other health problems.

Number of physicians and other medical staff

Most patients (85%) said that there was enough number of employed physicians. According to the majority of patients (75%), the number of other medical staff was also satisfactory (Figure 1).

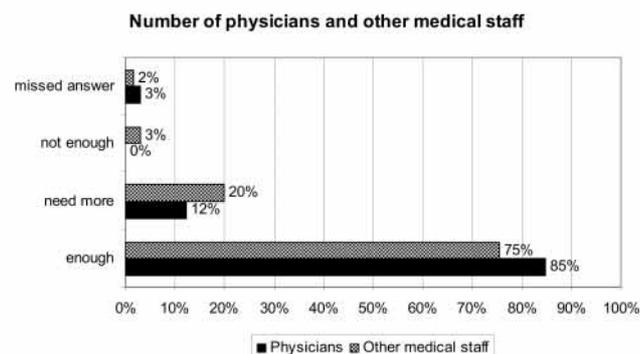


Figure 1. Opinion of patient about enough number of employed physicians and other staff

Satisfaction with competence and skills of physicians and nurses

Asking patients how they would rate competence and skills of physicians and nurses, 92% said that physicians were highly skilled and experienced and 85% said the same for nurses (Figure 2). None of the patients (0%) reported that physicians and nurses had low level of competence.

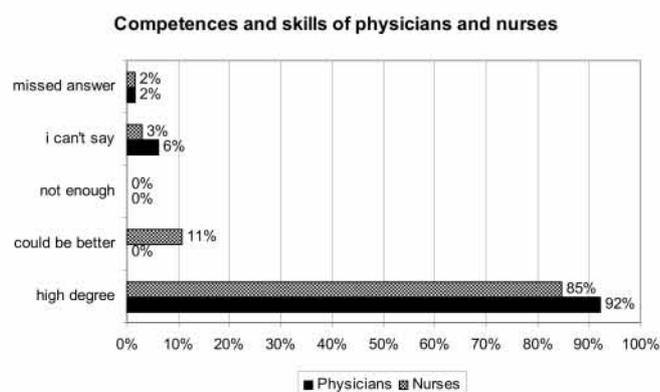


Figure 2. Opinion of patient about competence and skills of physicians and nurses

Humanity of physicians and nurses

Obtained answers to the question regarding the question about humanity among of medical staff show that 78% of patients think that physicians possess high level of humanity, and 66% patient think the same for nurses (Figure 3).

Kindness of physicians and nurses

Kindness of hospital staff is very important. Patients always make distinction between how they are treated medically and personally. Most of patients (86%) have rated kindness of physician very high, and almost the same percent of patients (83%) the same answer for nurses (Figure 4). None of the patients (0%) reported that physicians and nurses had low level of kindness.

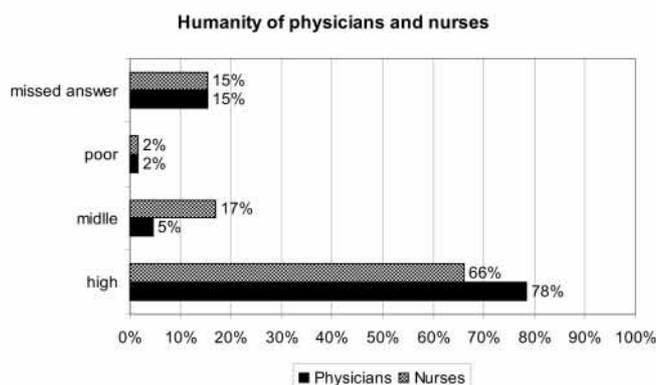


Figure 3. Opinion of patient about humanity of physicians and nurses

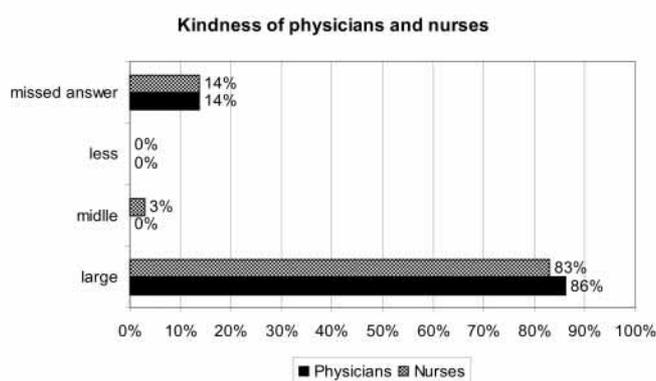


Figure 4. Opinion of patient about kindness of physicians and nurses

DISCUSSION

Our survey was a part of the patients' satisfaction survey on national level. It was a postal survey conducted among the Institute's patients - to measure levels of satisfaction and to identify further ways of hospital service improvement. Questionnaires were given to 99 patients and 65 patients completed it and returned it within two weeks. The response rate we obtained was 65.66%, which is slightly higher than the national response rate obtained in England (63%) (7). However, our response rate was lower than the national response rate (72.99%) obtained in Serbia (10). In future surveys the response rate should be improved which could be achieved by using other approaches such as prenotification letter, attractive cover letter, reminder letter, etc.

We used the questionnaire developed by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia and the Institute of Public Health of Serbia. The questionnaire consists of 45 questions that covered the rating overall hospital experience of the patients and specific dimensions of hospital care: patients' satisfaction with physicians and nurses, hospital facilities, access to hospital, schedule for family visits, etc. However, our results cover only one part of the questionnaire, that is satisfaction of patients with physicians and nurses. As this questionnaire was not scored and not structured by dimension of patients' experience, we had a problem to compare our results with results from other countries, e.g., England and Australia. In England, the questionnaire is structured and based on seven dimensions of patient's experience; they calculate overall mean rate (7). In Australia, the questionnaire is structured by six dimensions of patient's experience and they calculate overall care index (6). In future, we need to review our questionnaire and national survey methodology and to find more appropriate way to present patients' satisfaction. This will facilitate the comparison between the hospitals and tracking of hospital performance during given time.

It is important to point out that to some questions a great percent of patients did not give answers. However, the obtained results were positive in following aspects: 92% responded that physicians possess high degree of competences and skills - the highest satisfaction rating. Our results are slightly higher than the percentage obtained at the level of Serbia (90%), as reported in survey report of the Institute of Public Health of Serbia (10). In our survey, the competence of nurses has also been ranged high (85%), which is better than the national average level (83.9%). These percentages were expected having in mind that there is a good program of continual medical and nursing education at the Institute of Oncology Sremska Kamenica.

In our survey, the patients were asked to rate some of the attributes of physicians and nurses such as humanity and kindness. Humanity is one of the most important characteristics of healthcare professionals. It includes their ethical knowledge and attitudes. The results of our survey show that most of respondents rated high this attribute of physicians (78%) and nurses (66%). However, the obtained results are slightly lower than those obtained at the national level.

CONCLUSION

A vital step to improving hospital and other health care services to ensure that they are meeting the needs of the patients is to ask the patients about their experiences and opinions with healthcare providers. It is great importance that patients have trust and good communication with healthcare professionals. As a result, the survey findings provide information, which can be used by the hospitals for quality improvements. In this way, patients become active participants in the creation of healthcare improvement.

The results presented in this paper show that the patients seem very much satisfied with the healthcare professionals. However, we can conclude that some improvements are possible and required.

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