

## Patients' Perceptions of Quality in Healthcare: A review

\*Tarafdar MA

### Abstract

An individual's perception is their reality. Due to individual expectations two patients can provide different satisfaction scores after receiving the same care. It reflects how that care is supposed to be delivered as perceived by the patient. The individualized perception of a patient is influenced by patient's individual values, personal beliefs, cultural background, age, education level, socioeconomic status, health literacy, and previous health care experiences. Patients perceived low quality of physical care are extremely complicated to explain. Patients socio-demographic variables, especially age, sex, level of education, income, family background, ethnicity all can influence perceived satisfaction. The overall quality measure is either satisfying or dissatisfying. The health care administrators, health educators and other stakeholders and the community at large are in constant pressure to improve the patient perception of quality health care. The increase in perceived care quality from the patients' perspective are associated with improved environmental conditions, care quality related to the health care personnel, information-communication and technological development. The high-tech environment may not improve patients' perceptions towards quality care provided by health care personnel if there is no empathy. Patient-centered service is recognized as a core component of quality care. Patient-centered care is cost-effective and improves outcomes and patients are genuinely involved in healthcare decisions and their preferences are considered, the result is better health, more involved patients and lower costs.

**Key words:** Perception, satisfaction, health care, quality care

**Received on: 10.10.2023; Accepted on: 30.10.2023**

### Introduction

Healthcare environment is highly competitive now-a-days, hospital managers are realizing the need to focus on service quality to survive and improvement of the perception of the patients and their attendants are dependent on their satisfaction. This target leads not only to satisfy and improve communication with the patient but their attendants and families also. Health managers with positive attitude would bring about better outcomes for staff, health community and health organization.

Quality care is one of the major pillars of health care delivery system, as well as public health. To have good quality care is one of the basic rights of the patients in a hospital is which needs to be fulfilled at the earliest and at the proper time. Healthcare management is under increasing pressure to demonstrate that their services are patient focused and directed to providing the best possible medical care for their patients.<sup>1</sup>

Satisfaction is a complex and multidimensional concept with divergent expressions of different stakeholders in healthcare. Extremely divergent notions regarding satisfaction is a common phenomenon, what is satisfactory to a patient may be different to another patient. Measuring satisfaction from the patient's perspective may provide insight to how these considerations directly affect or influence by the healthcare delivery system.<sup>2</sup>

### Authors affiliation:

Monowar Ahmad Tarafdar, Professor, Department of Community Medicine, ZH Sikder Women's Medical College, Dhaka.

**\*Address of correspondence:** Prof. Dr. Monowar Ahmad Tarafdar, Professor, Department of Community Medicine, ZH Sikder Women's Medical College, Dhaka. Email: babla762@yahoo.com

### Factors determining perception of patients

In developing countries, common concerns with the quality of healthcare generally include long waiting time, the attitude of care providers towards patients, ineffective consultation by the doctors, these factors influence both patient satisfaction and experience.<sup>3</sup>

Quality in healthcare service delivery refers to services that meet set standards, implying excellence and satisfy the needs of both consumers and healthcare practitioners in a way that adds significant meaning to both parties.<sup>4</sup>

Perception (from Latin perceptio 'gathering, receiving') is the identification, organization and interpretation of sensory information in order to understand and represent the presented information or environment.<sup>5</sup>

Perception, in humans, the process whereby sensory stimulation is translated into organized experience. That experience, or percept, is the joint product of the stimulation and of the process itself. Philosophical interest in perception evolve mainly from questions about the sources and validity of what is called human knowledge.<sup>6</sup>

Perception is conscious sensory experience. All perception involves signals conveyed through the nervous system, which in turn result from chemical or physical stimulation of the sensory system.<sup>7</sup>

An individual's perception is their reality. After receiving same care, two patients can care may have different satisfaction due to individual expectations towards the care supposed to be delivered. A patient's perception is person specific and influenced by personal beliefs, values, cultural background, age, education level, health literacy, socioeconomic status, and previous health care experiences.<sup>8</sup>

Achieving patient satisfaction and maximum quality care is the main concern of management and healthcare professionals.<sup>9</sup>

Patients will be more satisfied with their medical consultations who recognize and perceive that their healthcare providers are in all conscience concerned about them, if health care providers show empathy, the ultimate achievement is patient satisfaction and is greatly influencing patient's perception regarding services they receive.<sup>10</sup>

Changing pattern of expectation from the patient side also change the level of satisfaction of patients. Higher education rate, improved socioeconomic status and availability of medical care has broaden the demands from consumers of the health care services.<sup>11</sup>

The patients' perceptions should be central to quality improvement of the healthcare system at national level as well as globally. The need to improve the cognition of physical needs (food and water quality and environmental sanitation) and human resources (health staff to patient ratio) as well as the individual patients' needs proper attention.<sup>12</sup>

According to Suhonen and colleagues, level of educational, age, gender, physical environment, length of stay and admission type have a significant influence on patient's perceived care as perception is individualized.<sup>13,14</sup>

On the organizational level, the number of wards in a hospital and the number of beds per ward, as well as nurses' work engagement and the ward's service climate, seem to influence individualized care.<sup>15,16</sup>

Patient's perception depends on patient's experience. Patient's experience, as defined by The Beryl Institute as "the sum of all interactions, shaped by an organization's culture, as well as patient's cultural background influence patient perceptions across the continuum of care." The key action words in the definition above are, "influence the patient perceptions." The common factors influencing a patient's perception of their experiences are age, acuity, culture, socioeconomic status, and cognitive capacity.<sup>17</sup>

Studies identified some wide ranges of factors of patient satisfaction, from admission to discharge services, from medical care to interpersonal communication. Responsiveness, clinical skill, communication skill, attitude, comforting skill, amenities, food services, cleanliness etc were found to be responsible for positive or negative perception of the patients. interpersonal and

technical skills of health care providers are two most important determinants for assessment of hospital care by patient.<sup>18</sup>

Assessing patient's perception regarding OPD services depend upon several factors like availability of prescribed medication, ease of finding OPD locations, attitude of the registration staff and other staff, accessibility to services and waiting time.<sup>19</sup>

In a study Li et al addressed patients' perception related to the service quality of hospitals in 9 Chinese cities. Empathy and reliability emerged as strong perception predictors of service quality.<sup>20</sup>

The health care is becoming increasingly market driven and no more free rather it is a commodity, it is imperative that those purchasing and using it define its quality and value. The low perception score is mainly due to hospital infrastructure, medical information conveyed to the patients and doctor's behavior.<sup>21</sup>

Prolonged waiting times, overcrowding at OPD, poor service provider's attitude, inadequate information and lack of communication system and lack of drugs are most frequent complain of clients attending health care centers. Clients' satisfaction with services in public facilities are of lower than in private facilities. Baseline data to assess clients' perception towards care provides used for comparison, identifies inadequacy of attention towards patient's/client's perception regarding services provided.<sup>22</sup>

As until now the health care is taken as intangible service, measuring this service as a product has become a great challenge for technical staffs and the managers in the health services industry. Patient level of satisfaction is a complicated phenomenon which depends on patient expectations, health status, personal characteristics as well as health system characteristics. Patient satisfaction has evolved as an outcome measure as an indicator of quality of healthcare. In modern health industry, patient satisfaction surveys are increasingly taken as yardsticks to measure efficiency effectiveness of the service delivery system.<sup>23</sup>

Empathy, sympathy, and compassion are important determinant of satisfaction as perceived by the patients attending OPD or admitted in In-patient Department. These were identified while searching for patients' expectations as the patients perceived that whether they have been treated with full privacy and dignity, and the outpatient staff understood their needs.<sup>24</sup>

Nurses' respectful attitude towards patients, the lighting system of the hospital and cleanliness of the environment all are some of the determining positive or negative perception of the patients. Patient satisfaction and quality of care are intimately related. Other factors are waiting time at the OPD consultation, providing enough sitting arrangements, and communication skill and client friendliness of the OPD registration staffs.<sup>25</sup>

In hospitals, patients' expectations are well behavior of the providers in most of the cases and accessibility to information from doctors and receptionists are the factors which intern modify the level of satisfaction. How human ethics, humbleness and behaving well with patients can be reflected on the perception of the patients regarding satisfaction.<sup>26</sup>

The health systems, health care organizations and health practitioners need to change their attitude and strategy achieve a level of performance that meet the client's need and it is necessary to adopt a holistic and humanistic approach to health care and shift the service to patient centered care forms.<sup>27</sup>

Only few patients are satisfied with hospital staffs, paramedics and doctors. Doctor's time, behaviour of paramedics and poor quality of services provided by the ancillary staffs are the main reasons for dissatisfaction among the patients. Socio-demographic characteristics or previous exposure are the influencing factors in determining patient satisfaction.<sup>28</sup> Quality of services provided in relation to hospital care is the key ingredient to increase confidence of the patient.<sup>29</sup>

Assessment of service quality provided by the hospitals is a serious concern for hospital administration and health care providers due to the excessive demands imposed by users, consumers, government and the community at large. Measuring patient satisfaction has been encouraged by increasing patient awareness regarding their health rights in health care owing to access to information and as a consumer's views to compare different providers and at the same time the media's monitoring over the health providers pose extra demands.<sup>30</sup>

Satisfied patients are more likely to follow the advised treatment and promote referrals. The satisfied patients show the effectiveness of the health system, they point out the deficient service areas and can aid the improvement of the health system. So, assessing client satisfaction levels at continuous intervals can help to continuous improvement of the hospital services. Health education and counseling cell near the reception and registration counters can help to solve the patients and attendant's queries which in tern improve the perception regarding services provided.<sup>31</sup>

Many studies revealed that the level of satisfaction is higher in the secondary hospital significantly and to visit the secondary hospital than the tertiary hospital, people are more willing. This may be due to a good number of patients with minor ailments visit the tertiary hospital causing overload situation which is difficult to manage and satisfy by the health care providers.<sup>32</sup>

### Conclusion

Patients perception can be influenced through advocacy and involving patients in health care process, patients and patient attendants can be involved in shaping healthcare empathy, to act more patient friendly and empowering the patients. All these can be at individual level and

organization level to shape patient's perception so that the patients can involve and contribute improve their perception towards health care.

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