

The quality of hospital services in eastern Ethiopia: Patient's perspective

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Abstract

Examining the quality of care from the patient's perspective can help reveal important information about the quality of care afforded to patients. Their experience often contributes towards making the health service more responsive to clients - an area which currently being emphasized by WHO. In this study, total of 518 outpatients were interviewed at exit from hospitals. About 46% of the interviewees said that they were not satisfied with the health services provided. Satisfaction with health care was found to have a significant association with waiting time, the availability of drugs, the payment status of the respondent and the address of the patient. In conclusion this study has identified areas that need to be improved to make the service more responsive to the clients. [*Ethiop.J.Health Dev.* 2006;20(3):199-200]

Introduction

Quality involves the consistent delivery of a product or service according to expected standards (1). Patient satisfaction survey is the commonly used method to assess the non-technical aspects of quality of care. In recent years, donors have been advising developing countries to ensure that limited resources not only have an optimal impact on the population's health at affordable cost but also that health services are client-oriented. For instance, the World Health Report emphasizes responsiveness of health systems as a crucial component of their overall performance defining responsiveness as the way the system responds to non-health aspects, and whether it was meeting or not meeting patient expectations (2). Quality assessment studies usually measure one of the three aspects of quality- structure, process and outcome. Asking for and understanding users' views and measuring patient expectations are seen as key components of both process and outcome evaluation and the effectiveness of health care to some degree is determined by consumer satisfaction with the services provided (3-4). Moreover, patient satisfaction is also directly related with utilization rate and hence meeting patient satisfaction improves the utilization of health services.

Methodology

In Harari region there are two secondary (Zonal) hospitals under the Regional Health Bureau, which act as major referral hospitals for the whole of the eastern part of Ethiopia. A cross-sectional survey was conducted in these hospitals from March 13-24 for two consecutive weeks by using a pre-tested, structured questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of demographic data and five points Likert scaled 11 items. Patients who responded as 1 (very dissatisfied), 2 (dissatisfied) and 3 (Neutral) were classified as dissatisfied while those who responded 4 (satisfied) and 5 (very satisfied) were classified as satisfied. The items were selected after reviewing literatures on patient satisfaction in other countries. All data were analysed by computer using SPSS, Version 10 statistical package.

Results

A total 518 outpatient health service users were interviewed after completing their health care. The majority of the patients were in the age group 15-30 (58.9 %) and came from out side of the region (53%). The mean score for the overall satisfaction according to the five point Likert scale was 3.44 with a standard deviation of 0.84. The least degree of satisfaction is observed for the general cleanliness of the facility followed by provider's behaviour towards the patient and waiting time between registrations and being seen by the provider. However, the satisfactions level related to consultation time, laboratory and pharmaceutical service is relatively higher (See Figure 1). Statistical analysis has shown that the level of satisfaction decreased with an increase in perceived length of waiting time $p < 0.01$. Satisfaction was also found to be lower for patients coming outside of the region, $p < 0.01$ and paying status, $p < 0.01$. The overall satisfaction is also found to be related to the availability of drugs within the facility, $p < 0.01$. No significant differences were identified in the level of satisfaction based on age, educational status and consultation time.

Discussion

The overall satisfaction level of the patients in this study is 54.1 %. This percentage is very low compared to other studies in developing countries - 68% in rural Bangladesh (6), and 74% in Trinidad and Tobago (7). But it is a comparable study in the western parts of Ethiopia (8). Similar to other studies this survey has shown that short waiting time for registration and being seen by a health provider are associated with high satisfaction scores (7-8). The level of satisfaction is also related to the payment status as paying patients are less satisfied than non-paying patients with the overall quality of the service. This may be related to the fact that their expectation of the service may raise when they incur certain costs to the service. No relationship has been observed between level of satisfaction and age, educational status or consultation time. Overall, the findings of this study have shown that there is a need to

address the long waiting time by undertaking further study like client flow-up and analysis. The hospital management also needs to act on related problems like

staff courteousness and politeness. Moreover, there is also a need for further research on the quality of health services by taking a broader perspective.

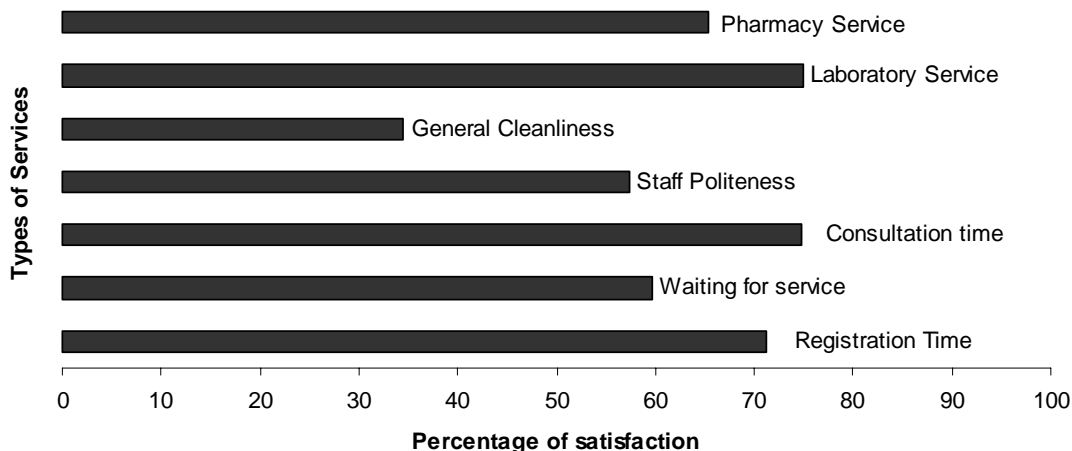


Figure 1: Percentage of satisfaction for different kinds of service at outpatient department

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