



Patient satisfaction with the provided Health services in the Public system in Greece

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ABSTRACT: One of the most important dimensions of quality in health care is the extent to which users feel satisfied with the health services provided and the providers of these services. The quality of health services is now one of the key priorities of modern states as it is the key to ensuring the good health of citizens and improving the quality of their health. It is a particularly complex concept and relates to their relevance, their continuity and security, their immediacy and their universal accessibility to all citizens. Ensuring the quality of health services is a matter of major importance and therefore its measurement and evaluation is very important. Various indicators have been constructed to measure and evaluate the quality of health services, one of which is health service user satisfaction. Patient satisfaction can be seen as a measure of how well those providing health services have succeeded in meeting the needs and expectations of the patient. The investigation of patient satisfaction in the context of an organized health care system is an integral part of this system, since the measurement of patient satisfaction is an important indicator for the evaluation of the quality of the health care services provided. In fact, the relationship between patient and health care provider is a two-way relationship that must be constantly cultivated and fed back in order to improve quality and optimize the patient's health.

KEYWORDS: Patient satisfaction, quality of health services, patient-physician relationship.

I. INTRODUCTION

Quality of healthcare is a multidimensional concept with medical, social, political, ethical, business and economic implications and outcomes. The provision of high quality services by healthcare organizations can be a strategy for achieving competitive advantage and the service user is now becoming a key player in the strategy for achieving quality. Quality measurement in public health care organizations focuses on the perceived 'value' of users from the

services provided since public organizations operate according to the principles of universality, equality, protection of the public interest and accessibility [1]. Patient satisfaction is undoubtedly an element of quality of medical services. It is a set of patients' attitudes and perceptions of health services. The extent to which a person considers health care to be useful, effective and beneficial. It is essentially an assessment based on the fulfilment of the user's expectations of the care provided. It is mainly determined by the interaction of two factors, the patient's expectations and the experience of the services they receive. If the performance of services during a treatment process does not meet the patient's expectations, the patient is dissatisfied; if it does meet expectations, the patient is satisfied. Measuring patients' satisfaction with health services is a realistic tool for evaluating and improving health care services since it is based on the direct experiences of users who provide information on the ability of the provider to fulfil their values and expectations. Patients' evaluation of services provided by patients makes health professionals aware of their weaknesses and accountable to patients and to the administrations of the organizations [2].

Investigating the degree of patient satisfaction has been the subject of many researchers worldwide suggesting that patient satisfaction is intertwined with strategic decision making, design and management of healthcare systems and providers. With this in mind, healthcare managers are required to incorporate qualitative and quantitative criteria in the operation of these structures in order to achieve quality improvement and thus effective operational performance that will bring about reputational gains, increased profitability and market share, and reduced costs [3]. Patients' perceptions of quality are directly related to the financial performance of the hospital, affecting 17-27% of financial indicators such as net income and return on assets. Also, word-of-mouth



negative reputation can cost hospitals lost revenue of \$6,000-400,000 over the lifetime of a patient [4].

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers Sitzia and Wood [5] conducted a systematic review of the literature on patient satisfaction in healthcare. They found that patient satisfaction is a multidimensional concept that includes communication between patients and health professionals, the care provided and the effectiveness of treatment. In addition, researchers report that patient satisfaction is influenced by many factors, such as the quality of communication between patient and healthcare professional, the care provided and the patient's experience during treatment. Overall, the researchers concluded that patient satisfaction is important for the quality of health care and that improving it can improve patient health and lead to better treatment outcomes.

Khurshid [6] examined the relationship between patient-physician communication and patient satisfaction in the context of medical care. His research has shown that the quality of communication between the patient and the doctor is an important factor affecting patient satisfaction. According to Khurshid's study, communication characterized by mutual understanding, trust and respect, as well as providing enough information to the patient, is significantly associated with patient satisfaction. In addition, the researcher pointed out that patients who feel they have received sufficient information about their health status and treatment options are more likely to be satisfied than those who have not received enough information.

Researchers Singh & Bhardwaj [7] conducted a study to assess patient satisfaction in a public hospital in India. The study involved the collection of data from 500 patients treated in various hospital units. The researchers found that overall patient satisfaction was moderate, with an average score that was close to 60% of total points. Satisfaction also varies according to the hospital and the type of disease. The researchers suggested that steps should be taken to improve the quality of patient care and communication between patients and nurses.

The study by Al-Abri and Al-Balushi [8] published aimed to assess patient satisfaction in two public hospitals in Muscat, Oman. The researchers used a questionnaire to collect data from 500 patients. The results showed that overall patient satisfaction was high, with the majority of patients feeling satisfied with the care they received. Communication with doctors and nurses was considered positive, while the quality of services and the cleanliness of the premises and facilities was rated as good. However, the study also highlighted some problems, such as delayed service provision and lack of privacy during

examinations and treatment. Therefore, the researchers proposed metrics to improve service quality and patient satisfaction.

Researchers Bleich, S. N., Ozaltin, E., & Murray, C. K. [9] conducted a study to assess patient satisfaction with the health care services provided. The study included a systematic review of the literature on patient satisfaction, as well as an analysis of the results of 65 studies conducted in different countries. The researchers found that patients are generally satisfied with the health services provided. However, there were large differences in patient satisfaction between different types of health services, such as medical clinics, hospitals and health centers. In addition, the researchers found that patient satisfaction is linked to several factors, such as communication with the doctor, the availability of health services and the quality of care provided.

Researchers Hall, J. A., Dornan, M. C., & Hughes, T. L. [10] have conducted research on patient satisfaction with health services provided. In their study, they analyze how patients evaluate communication between themselves and health professionals and what role this communication plays in their satisfaction with health services. Specifically, they found that the quality of communication between patients and health professionals is an important factor in patient satisfaction with health services. In addition, they reported that patient satisfaction increases when health professionals are more sensitive to patients' needs and clearly explain their health condition and the treatment provided.

Many authors [11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16] through their surveys assessed and recorded the degree of user satisfaction with the various dimensions (e. g., the appointment booking process, the process of arrival at the health facility, the process of waiting until the examination, the hospitalization period, the clinic and health professionals, the discharge process, etc.) of the health services they receive. Although, the investigation of the degree of user satisfaction with the health services provided by health units is an object that has been studied to a considerable extent, it is always at the center of interest of researchers as the conditions in health units change over time and especially in a period of economic - health crisis, such as the one Greece has been experiencing in recent years. Various research questions are generated, through which the degree of user satisfaction with the health services provided by the public health system in Greece will be assessed:



1) To what extent are users of health services in the public system satisfied with the various dimensions of the health services?
2) To what extent is the behavior and general functioning of the medical, nursing and administrative service related to patient satisfaction and how much does it contribute to the overall evaluation of the hospital?

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to be able to answer the previous four research questions mentioned in the previous chapter 2, many researchers made use of structured and unstructured questionnaires. In order to enable the collection of the necessary primary data, a questionnaire was used, which was to be completed by the users of health services of the public health system. The questionnaire is a widely used research tool and is chosen by those researchers who aim to carry out a survey based on the presentation of data on the subject under investigation [17]. Through the answers given to the questionnaire, the degree of satisfaction with the health services provided (nursing, administrative, etc.) was recorded in order to identify the weak points of the public health system.

The questionnaire-based method of analysis is directly affected in terms of the validity of the

IV. QUALITY OF HEALTH SERVICES

The systematic assessment of health quality was introduced in America in the 1960s-1970s and was mandatory, using health indicators that included analysis of hospital days and reimbursement costs. The assurance of health services is related to technical issues such as the operation of medical equipment and de facto includes factors such as staffing, organization, administration, clinical practice and responsiveness to patient needs [18].

The quality of health services is an area of increasing scrutiny as professional standards are sometimes below the minimum acceptable levels of quality, which is mainly due to financial constraints [19]. Health service users today are better educated and more aware of their consumption of health services, demanding a higher level of service [20].

Patients are now carefully searching for information on the available information sources (internet) and monitoring the available options, turning them into discerning shoppers. Patients, moreover, qualify as unique customers because they do not voluntarily seek the health services offered, but are interested in their consumption. Therefore, they will seek the best available service for the

3) To what extent are users of health services in the public health system satisfied with their overall experience?

4) How does the degree of satisfaction of users of public health services vary according to their demographic characteristics?

results and, by extension, the conclusions to be drawn, by the reliability of the answers given by the respondents. It is often observed that respondents either do not take the whole process seriously or do not understand the questions accurately, thus reducing the credibility of the whole research process.

For this reason, any survey based on questionnaire completion must record whether respondents answered the questions consistently. Similarly, with the help of Spss, the consistency of the questionnaire answers will be assessed by estimating the Cronbach's a coefficient for each group of answers concerning relevant items. Cronbach's coefficient a, takes values from 0 to 1 and indicates that the answers given were answered relatively consistently when it takes values close to 1. In contrast, this coefficient indicates that the responses given are not consistent when it takes values closer to 0.

treatment required. Patient assessment may be different from health provider assessment as it is based on quality objectives, mainly stemming from the existence of asymmetric information between the health professional and the recipient of health services [21].

Therefore, healthcare staff should find a balance between the desires that patients have and the expectations related to the effectiveness of healthcare providers [22].

Quality in the health sector is a more complex concept than quality in industrial enterprises. The main reason is the fact that in industrial companies quality is related to the adherence to certain product specifications, so that there are no deviations from the process and the final results. On the contrary, in health care facilities it is observed that patients and cases are de facto different from each other and consequently the methods of treatment differ from each other. In this context, the need to achieve zero defects in health contributes to the reduction of "bad" practice and therefore to the enhancement of "good" practice, which suggests an increase in the level of quality of health services [23].



The World Health Organization (WHO) defines quality of health services as "the provision of diagnostic and therapeutic procedures capable of ensuring the best possible health outcomes within the capabilities of modern medical science aimed at maximum patient satisfaction" [24].

Quality of health services means providing the best possible care to the patient, delivering what is needed, at the right time, in the right way and to the person who needs it. In addition, the quality of health services, from an administrative point of view, implies the provision of efficient care in a cost-effective manner through an appropriate allocation of the available resources of the system. Patients, for their part, perceive quality as the ability to choose and access the desired and appropriate health services in the shortest possible time. However, in many cases consumer expectations are particularly high and in this sense the creation of an appropriate relationship between healthcare providers and patients contributes effectively to the fulfilment of patients' demands [25].

V. THE DIMENSIONS OF QUALITY IN HEALTH SERVICES

Health services have three dimensions, the first of which concerns the structures and specifically the human resources that staff the health units as well as the available facilities and infrastructure. The second dimension of health services is processes and refers to all the functions and actions that take place in order to be able to offer the final services to patients. The third and final dimension of health services is outcomes and relates to the impact of the health services provided on the health of patients. Therefore, in order to be able to measure the quality of health services it is very important to evaluate the individual dimensions in detail [27, 28].

In the context of measuring the quality of the above dimensions of health services, many different tools can be used that lead to meaningful findings and important observations. One of these tools is quality indicators, which provide very useful information on the performance of the various departments of health care units as well as on the characteristics of the health services provided. In particular, the quality indicators used to measure the quality of health services are structural indicators that assess the quality of facilities and human resources, such as access to the health facility, the availability of appropriate technological equipment, the training of human resources and the ratio between health professionals and patients [29].

According to Donabedian [26], quality "is the kind of care that is expected to maximize the benefit to the patient, taking into account the benefits as well as the losses inherent in the process of care". In this context, the following dimensions for the provision of health services are identified:

Psychological dimension: it is the interpersonal part and is related to the treatment of the patient by health professionals. It includes features of professional ethics on the part of health professionals as well as social features reflecting the demands of patients.

Technical dimension: it is the technical part related to the application of treatment practices as well as to the whole practical application of medical science in order to treat the patient as best as possible.

Environmental dimension: this relates to the existing infrastructure and environment of the health facility, which includes the conditions under which health services are provided to patients.

Process indicators, as expected, assess the functions and actions that take place in health facilities in order to produce health services and be consumed by patients. Such indicators may relate to the length of time that some machines are out of service due to breakdowns, the waiting time of patients in order to receive the appropriate treatment for the health problem they are experiencing, the waiting time of patients from the time they request an examination to the actual examination time, as well as the number of patients served in a given period of time. Finally, there are outcome indicators that assess the effectiveness of health services such as mortality rates, quality of life indicators, the degree of patient satisfaction and the time during which patients do not show symptoms of illness [30].

At this point it is very important to stress that the indicators chosen to measure the quality of health services should have specific characteristics. More specifically, indicators should be distinguished for their usefulness, to help draw conclusions that can be used as a basis for designing improvements. They must also be distinguished for their validity, which means that they should have the ability to measure the quantity for which they are designed, as well as for their reliability, their ability to give the same results in repeated measurements with the same data. Also, some of the basic



characteristics of the indicators are the ability to compare the results with the standards, the sensitivity related to the accuracy of the index, the specificity related to the ability to focus on groups with very specific characteristics and finally the responsiveness related to the detection of changes [31].

In recent years, the quality of health services provided is of decisive importance as it is directly related to the health of patients and to the formation of the health level of the citizens of a country. Quality, as already mentioned in the above section, is a decisive characteristic of the services produced as it concerns the extent to which these services can satisfy the needs and expectations of consumers. However, in health services, the concept of quality becomes even more complex as it concerns not only the extent to which patients' needs are met but also in many other dimensions such as eliminating bad practices, preventing mistakes, improving patients' health status and making proper use of available resources [32].

In the case of health services, quality is determined by specific characteristics or different by specific dimensions such as suitability, which is related to the extent to which the health service is considered ideal for the health problem faced by the

VI. PATIENT SATISFACTION

Measuring patient satisfaction is not a recent research subject. It was introduced around the beginning of the 20th century when scientific interest began to turn to the evaluation of the care offered to patients and not only to the way the disease progresses [35]. In modern literature there is no commonly accepted definition on which all researchers converge. Various theories have been put forward about patient satisfaction with healthcare. Donabedian [36] defined patient satisfaction as a subjective perception that healthcare providers should take as real without evaluating it from their own perspective, as the way patients feel plays an important role. [37]. In addition, Bond and Thoma formulated that patients seem more satisfied in situations in which their internal needs for interpersonal relationships and participation in decisions are met, while they are dissatisfied when environmental factors and facilities are not appropriate [38].

Patient satisfaction is related to how patients understand their needs and expectations within the health system and their experience within healthcare facilities. The concept of satisfaction is multidimensional as it encompasses medical and non-medical aspects of healthcare. The need to

patient, availability of health services when the patient needs them, continuity related to the provision of holistic and not fragmented health services, the effectiveness related to the ability of health services to improve the patient's health through the treatment and management of their disease, the effectiveness related to the utilization of all best practices, the respect and care shown by health professionals to the patient and finally the safety related to the knowledge that the health service will not cause any harm to the patient [33]. According to Malamou [34], quality in health services is divided into three sub-categories, the first of which is technical quality, the second is interpersonal quality and the third is the quality of hotel infrastructure. The technical quality of health services is inextricably linked to the knowledge and skills of health professionals as well as to the selection of the most appropriate methods and strategies for dealing with and managing patients' health problem. Interpersonal quality refers to the satisfaction of patients' needs through the investigation of their preferences and the use of methods that are consistent with their needs and preferences. The quality of hotel infrastructure refers to the quality of the conditions prevailing in indoor areas providing health services.

measure satisfaction has been greatly influenced by the health consumer movement that has emerged, where the satisfaction of health care recipients is one of the key goals of healthcare providers. With the presence of the patients' rights movement, the debate began between the model of technical care, which is considered well-established, and the relationship between patient satisfaction as a valuation of the care process [39]. This has resulted in greater dissemination of the implementation of patient satisfaction measures. In French hospitals, for example, since 1998 patient satisfaction assessment has been mandatory and implemented mainly with the aim of improving the hospital environment and facilities, but not necessarily to improve care [40].

Patient satisfaction has been taken into account by many health structures worldwide aiming at improving quality, which is considered a critical factor in measuring the quality of health organizations [41]. Also, the growing power of consumerism in society highlights the central role patients play in the design and delivery of health services. A satisfied patient is more likely to develop a deeper and long-lasting relationship with their medical provider, leading to adherence to medical guidelines, continuity of care, and ultimately better health outcomes [42, 43]. Staying with the view that



correlates patient satisfaction with consumer spirit, it should be noted that consumer satisfaction has been an important factor in measuring the performance of different types of organizations. It refers to the extent to which consumers perceive their needs and expectations to be met by the service provider [44]. This concern about consumerism highlights the crucial role patients play in the design and delivery of healthcare services [45].

VII. THE IMPORTANCE OF ASSESSING PATIENT SATISFACTION WITH HEALTH SERVICES

Patients' satisfaction with the health services provided refers to the extent to which the services provided can meet their expectations and needs. The expectations and needs of patients do not only concern the outcome of their health condition but also all the procedures carried out until they receive the final health service. More specifically, patients wish and seek at the same time to receive the best possible service that fully responds to the health problem they face immediately, which means without time delays, detailed information about the health problem they face as well as to feel that they are treated with respect by health professionals [47].

The investigation of the degree of satisfaction of patients with the health services they receive is a very important process as the degree of satisfaction seems to affect accordingly their degree of compliance with medication. More simply, it is observed that patients who are satisfied with the health services they receive, tend to follow in a more faithful way the instructions of their doctors as well as their medication. Conversely, patients who are not satisfied with the health services they receive, and this low satisfaction may be due either to the doctor or to the procedures that have been applied, do not follow the instructions of the doctor treating them as well as do not comply with the recommended medication [48, 49].

VIII. CONCLUSION

There are various studies that have been conducted regarding user satisfaction with the health services they receive both in Greece and in other countries. A general finding is that users of health services receive high levels of satisfaction from their overall experience, but this does not mean, however, that there is no room for further improvement. Quite large is the percentage of health service users who are satisfied with the attitude, behaviour and knowledge of health professionals, while less

Thus, patients' view of healthcare has become an important issue in recent decades and has been identified as key to improving the quality of care. Satisfaction with care services is a reliable tool for measuring the quality of healthcare and has been used as a research result of the quality of healthcare delivery [46]. However, patient satisfaction or dissatisfaction is a complex phenomenon.

In recent years, patients' satisfaction with the health services they receive is used as an indicator that can evaluate the quality of health services provided [50, 51]. More specifically, according to Papakostidis and Tsoukalas [52], measuring patients' satisfaction with the health services they receive is one of the most important result indicators available in the context of evaluating the health services provided. This indicator is chosen to be used both by health researchers interested in recording the quality of services provided and by hospital administrations in order to understand the quality of services provided, as perceived by patients [53].

Furthermore, it is very important to emphasize that assessing patient satisfaction can help health unit administrations manage their human resources more effectively and motivate health professionals to improve their performance [54]. More specifically, the results concerning the evaluation of the health services provided through the investigation of patient satisfaction, can help the administrations of health units to identify those departments that have weaknesses as well as those departments that function in the best possible way. Essentially, by conducting patient satisfaction evaluation surveys, administrations gain better knowledge about the problems they face but can also create reward programs for those departments whose performance ranges at very high levels [55].

satisfied with the time that elapses between the desire to receive the health service and the actual time of receiving it. In conclusion, the results of the studies that have been carried out reflect the fact that it is now necessary to continuously take actions in order to improve the health services provided to users, so that the problems that arise are dealt with and they enjoy greater satisfaction. Despite the abundance of research that has been carried out from time to time on user satisfaction with the health services provided in the public health system, it is a



subject of research that will concern researchers over time, due to the variability of conditions in health units, both financially and health level, over the years.

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