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Improving quality in healthcare: What makes a satisfied patient?



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Abstract

Objective: To update the metric properties of a perceived quality questionnaire for patients admitted to hospital medical departments, to determine the level of patient satisfaction achieved, and to identify the variables which predict satisfaction.

Methods: Self-administered questionnaire completed at home following patient discharge, using a questionnaire prepared by the authors on a sample of 7207 users of medical departments in 9 public hospitals during the years 2006–2009. A principal component analysis with varimax rotation was performed. Reliability was assessed using internal consistency coefficient. An analysis was made of the compliance with each indicator reported by respondents. A logistic regression analysis was performed to determine the perceived quality dimensions which predicted overall patient satisfaction.

Results: The results of the reliability analysis indicated good coefficients for interpersonal manner (0.94) and professional competence (0.85) dimensions, and moderate values for the other dimensions (comfort 0.55, information 0.38, and organisation 0.37). Factor analyses showed single factors in each of the perceived quality dimensions, with a percentage of explained variance greater than 35% for information, interpersonal manner, professional competence, and comfort, and less than 30% for organisation. The dimensions which predicted satisfaction were interpersonal manner of healthcare staff, professional competence, and information.

Conclusions: The metric properties of the questionnaire used have been updated, yielding a valid and reliable questionnaire for assessing patient satisfaction in quality management programmes, both for internal purposes and for conducting external comparisons.

A positive relationship was obtained between the level of patient satisfaction and level of professional competence, interpersonal manner of healthcare staff, and information received.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Satisfacción del paciente;
Calidad de atención;
Satisfacción en la asistencia sanitaria;
Validez;
Encuesta;
Cuestionarios

Mejora de la calidad en los cuidados de salud: ¿Qué hace que un paciente esté satisfecho?**Resumen**

Objetivo: Revisar las propiedades métricas de un cuestionario de calidad percibida de los servicios médicos hospitalarios, determinar el nivel de satisfacción de los usuarios e identificar los indicadores de calidad predictores de satisfacción.

Métodos: Se ha utilizado un cuestionario autoadministrado en el domicilio al alta del paciente. La muestra fue de 7.207 usuarios de servicios médicos en 9 hospitales públicos desde 2006 a 2009. Se analizó la fiabilidad (consistencia interna) de las dimensiones de calidad percibida y su validez interna usando análisis de componentes principales. Finalmente, se realizó un análisis de regresión logística para determinar las dimensiones de calidad que mejor predecían la satisfacción del paciente.

Resultados: Las dimensiones de trato y competencia profesional mostraron altos coeficientes de fiabilidad (0,94 y 0,85, respectivamente), para el resto de dimensiones los valores fueron moderados (0,37 a 0,55). El análisis de componentes principales indicó que las diferentes dimensiones de calidad (trato, competencia profesional, información, confort y organización) son unidimensionales, explicando cada una de ellas más de un 35% de la varianza, excepto para organización, que fue próxima al 30%. El trato recibido por el usuario, la competencia profesional percibida y la información fueron las dimensiones de calidad que mejor pronosticaron la satisfacción del paciente.

Conclusiones: El cuestionario de calidad percibida mostró adecuadas propiedades métricas, siendo válido y fiable para la valoración de la satisfacción del paciente en los programas de gestión de la calidad, tanto con fines internos como para la realización de comparaciones externas.

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Introduction

Information on the degree of satisfaction and perceived quality reported by health service users and their families is useful for improving the organisation of healthcare, and serves as a starting point for improving service quality.¹⁻⁴ Patient satisfaction forms part of health centre outcomes and is an essential element in the evaluation of these organisations. Hence, the dimension of patient satisfaction with care received is included in all healthcare quality assessment models.

However, patient satisfaction is a complex variable⁴ and there is no general consensus on the factors with which it is associated. In a systematic review⁵ of over 3000 articles, the authors concluded that satisfaction is a relative concept, a reflection of patient assessments of the quality of care they received compared to subjective standards, which can be influenced by previous health status, severity of illness or other factors such as age. They also indicated inconsistent influence of gender, race, socioeconomic or educational level on patient satisfaction. Furthermore, satisfaction is a multidimensional concept which varies according to the type of care provided and which requires the use of different tools for the different areas of health care.⁶

Of the various methods available to determine the degree of satisfaction with health services, questionnaires are most commonly used.⁵ Among their advantages, questionnaires can be administered to any group of people, information about past events can be retrieved, a large amount of

information can be collected in a short time and they are relatively inexpensive.⁷

However, most of the questionnaires used to measure perceived quality and patient satisfaction did not provided data about metric characteristics (reliability and validity).⁸ In others it is necessary to update their metric properties, this is a necessary procedure since the characteristics of the target population may change over time. In addition, many of the questionnaires used to measure both perceived quality and inpatient satisfaction are the same for all patients, regardless of the illness that has resulted in their hospital admission or the unit in which they are cared for. Thus, patients admitted to medical services present characteristics that differentiate them from patients admitted to other hospital units,^{9,10} since they are older,¹¹ usually present comorbidity¹²⁻¹⁵ and have a longer average stay and a higher possibility of readmission.

The aim of this study was to update the metric properties of a perceived quality questionnaire used in the Hospital Medical Services,¹⁶ determine the degree of patient satisfaction with the care received and the variables related with patient satisfaction.

Material and methods**Participants**

The study population comprised the total number of patients discharged from the medical service of the nine general

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