



RESEARCH REPORT

Patient satisfaction with physiotherapy services in an Asian country: A report from Sri Lanka



Thilini Tennakoon, BSc (Physiotherapy)^a,
Piyanjali de Zoysa, PhD^{b,*}

^a *Allied Health Sciences Unit, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, Colombo, Sri Lanka*

^b *Department of Psychological Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka*

KEYWORDS

delivery of health care;
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patient satisfaction

Abstract Patient satisfaction is an important indicator of the quality of care provided to recipients of health services. In Sri Lanka, there is a dearth of research on patient satisfaction, particularly in the arena of physiotherapy services. Such research is important to address any issues in the physiotherapy service, such that patients' needs are better catered for, as well as to improve the marketability of physiotherapy services. The present study aimed to investigate patient satisfaction with the physiotherapy treatment received at a large government hospital in Sri Lanka. A cross-sectional survey study was conducted on a sample of 150 patients receiving physiotherapy treatment using a self-administered questionnaire. This was followed by a focus group discussion. Results indicated that the majority of patients were satisfied with the treatment received. Information on selected correlates of patient satisfaction such as physiotherapist-related factors, patient-related factors, nature of the physiotherapist–patient interaction, professionalism of the service provided, and the logistics of the treatment environment was discussed. Copyright © 2014, Hong Kong Physiotherapy Association Ltd. Published by Elsevier (Singapore) Pte Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Physiotherapists face great challenges due to competitive market place conditions. Although some physicians tend to reduce referrals to physiotherapy, other professionals, such

as Ayurveda and homeopathy practitioners, market their services well to prospective patients. With increases in market place competition, patient satisfaction has emerged as a variable of critical importance. In other words, patient satisfaction may also identify the likelihood of treatment compliance [1]. When patients are dissatisfied, they can spread a negative message about an organization, resulting in a heavy loss to that organization. Patients who report high satisfaction are more likely to continue the relationship with the health care practitioner

* Corresponding author. Department of Psychological Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, Kynsey Road, Colombo 8, Sri Lanka.

E-mail address: ptdz@stlnet.lk (P. de Zoysa).

by seeking additional care when needed [2] and adhere to recommended treatment plans [3]. Patient satisfaction is a multidimensional phenomenon [4], which includes the following factors: (1) patient-related factors; (2) physiotherapist-related factors; and (3) other factors.

It appears that the level of satisfaction varies with the disease condition. Hence, satisfaction is generally higher in patients with acute conditions than in those with chronic conditions [5], possibly because those with acute conditions are more optimistic about their outcome. Patients' age also appears to be an important factor, with older patients reporting more satisfaction [6]. This may be because older patients, coping with chronic pain and mobility problems, have a greater need for and hence appreciation of physiotherapy services. Further, older people may have lower expectations than younger patients [7]. There also appears to be sex-related differences in satisfaction, with females reporting more satisfaction than males [5]. Another determinant of satisfaction is the process of care. Key process variables that result in a high level of satisfaction are adequate duration [8], treatment frequency [5], appropriate follow-up [9], continuity of care [10], mode of treatment, and patient involvement in decision making [11]. Patients need to feel that they have had adequate time with the therapist [10] and that they have been evaluated carefully. Currently, there appears to be some pressure within the health sector to reduce the time a therapist spends with a patient. This maybe interpreted by patients as lack of interest and could lower their satisfaction with treatment [12]. Longitudinal continuity of care is important too; patients treated by the same practitioner over time are approximately three times more likely to report satisfaction than those who receive care from multiple therapists [4]. The mode of treatment may also impact satisfaction. For instance, patients with back pain were found to be equally or more satisfied with exercise-based physiotherapy than with passive treatment modalities [13].

A range of individual differences, including treatment expectations, personality characteristics, and previous treatment experiences, are also likely to drive aspects of satisfaction. Higher satisfaction is reported when the treatment process is more consultative. However, some patients prefer less involvement considering the physiotherapist as the "expert" [14]. This highlights the need for physiotherapists to tailor make their approach accordingly. The extent to which a patient is prepared for treatment appears to affect his/her level of satisfaction too; patients prepared in advance may collaborate better with the physiotherapist [15,16].

Further, a lower satisfaction level may be associated with an increase in the waiting time for treatment, inadequate waiting area facilities, a low level of faith on the therapist/health facility, and ineffective communication with the patient about his/her disease condition [17].

The physiotherapist's communication skills in giving appropriate explanations to the patient about his/her injuries and treatment plans, providing diagnostic/prognostic information, and liaising with other treatment providers are important factors of patient satisfaction [18]. Factors such as catering to the patients' expectations of symptomatic pain relief and providing self-management exercises [18] also contribute to satisfaction.

Other than patient- and physiotherapist-related factors, patient satisfaction is also associated with the organization and infrastructure of the physiotherapy treatment facility. Well-organized physiotherapy care is a determinant of high patient satisfaction [5]. Patients are more satisfied if the physiotherapy service is easy to access (in terms of location, parking, and clinic hours), involves helpful administrative staff, and is associated with low waiting times, and the premises are of a high standard [4]. Patient satisfaction was also associated with the type of facility, where patients were more satisfied in a private clinic than in a government hospital, possibly because of better resources in private clinics, in particular, the therapist time. However, compared with therapist and treatment components of care, these organizational variables were weaker predictors of satisfaction [19].

Patient satisfaction with physiotherapy care has not been closely monitored and limited studies exist [20], and in Sri Lanka there are no known studies. The measurement of such satisfaction is essential for improving services and would add to the scarce worldwide literature on this subject. Furthermore, these kinds of studies could serve as a learning tool as it may highlight staff's training/development needs [21]. Hence, the objective of this study was to evaluate patient satisfaction with the physiotherapy service at a government hospital in Sri Lanka and to identify the correlates associated with such satisfaction.

Methods

The Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, Colombo, Sri Lanka, granted ethics approval. The participants were informed that there were neither any risks nor any direct benefits to them for being involved in the study, and was assured that they could end the interview any time they wished. Personal identification data were not collected, and written informed consent was obtained prior to participation in the study.

Part I: self-administered questionnaire

Study design

This was a cross-sectional study that aimed to measure the level of satisfaction in patients who received physiotherapy treatment at General Hospital, Matara, Sri Lanka. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were also used thereafter to obtain more insights into this area.

Study sample

A convenience sampling method was used. The inclusion criteria were as follows: patients who were aged between 18 years and 65 years, were able to read and write in Sinhala, and had attended at least one physiotherapy session. Patients with cerebral palsy, Guillain-Barre Syndrome, and/or cognitive, visual or hearing impairment were excluded. A total of 150 adult patients receiving physiotherapy treatment at the study setting participated in this part of the study.

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