

IS PATIENT SATISFACTION ASSOCIATED WITH THE QUALITY OF HEALTHCARE? EVIDENCE FROM A STANDARDIZED PATIENT STUDY

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Objective: Access to healthcare services has reached wider coverage of people in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). However, there has not been corresponding quality healthcare provision in many settings, including in LMICs. Empirical evidence shows instances where there are incorrect diagnosis of illnesses, inability to carry out correct clinical procedures, and failure to prescribe correct medications. The study examined the association between patient satisfaction and patients' knowledge of clinical procedures to determine patients' expectations of care and patient satisfaction.

Methods: We conducted SP visits and patient exit interviews in primary healthcare facilities in the metropolitan districts of two South African provinces for two health areas: tuberculosis and contraception. The study captured data on clinical quality of 282 primary healthcare SP consultations and 381 patient exit interviews. This allowed us to compare through descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis the satisfaction ratings of SPs and real patients to the clinical quality of their encounters.

Results: We found a positive association between patient satisfaction and quality of care for Tuberculosis and Family Planning treatment for both real and standardized patient interviews although the strength of association is much stronger in trained SPs where patients are more informed about the level of care they should expect to receive.

Conclusions: These findings show that when patients know what to expect during patient-provider interaction, patient satisfaction increases. Patients' knowledge of clinical procedures appears to be driving patients' expectations of care and satisfaction.

Keywords: Patient satisfaction measure, clinical quality measures, standardised patient approach, South Africa

JEL Codes:

I11: Analysis of Health Care Markets

I14: Health and Inequality

I18: Government Policy; Regulation; Public Health

Citation: Hompashe et al. ASFI Annual Conference and Boot Camp, 28th-30th November 2023



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