

Assessment of ENT outpatient department services at a tertiary care centre: The patients' perspective

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ABSTRACT

Measuring patient satisfaction is one of the key components of the evaluation of health care service. Patient satisfaction surveys reflect the gap between the expected service and the experience of the service provided. To assess the services provided by the Department of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery (ENT) outpatient department (OPD), a patient satisfaction survey was conducted at Nepal Medical College and Teaching Hospital. The overall satisfaction among patients in this study was 74.8%. Satisfaction with the facilities present in the hospital and satisfaction with the visit to the doctor were found to be 78.9% and 63.4% respectively. We observed major dissatisfaction with the registration period (52.7%) and waiting time after reaching the OPD (49.8%). This study has unravelled the various lacunae in the existing services which need to be addressed seriously for the improvement of service provision in the hospital. Such surveys should be carried out at regular intervals to maintain the standard of care.

Keywords: ENT services, outpatient department, patients' satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

There is no consensus on how to define the concept of patient satisfaction in healthcare. Many authors tend to have different perceptions and definitions of patient satisfaction. Patient satisfaction mostly appears to represent attitudes towards care or aspects of care.¹⁻³ Patient satisfaction is the extent to which the patients feel that their needs and expectations are being met by the service provided.^{2,4}

Quality assessment studies generally measure one of the three aspects of quality: structure, process and outcome. Measuring client satisfaction is one of the key components of both process and outcome evaluation of the health care service provided.⁵ Patient satisfaction surveys reflect the gap between the expected service and the actual experience of the service provided.⁶

Recently, healthcare regulators have shifted towards a market-driven approach of turning patient satisfaction surveys into a quality improvement tool for overall organizational performance.⁷ In 1996, evaluation of patient satisfaction was mandatory for all French hospitals.⁸ In Germany, measuring satisfaction has been required since 2005 as an element of quality management reports.⁹ Since 2002, the Department of Health (DOH) has launched a national survey program in which all National Health Services (NHS) trusts in England have to survey patient satisfaction on an annual basis and report the results to their

regulators.¹⁰ Therefore, measurement of patient satisfaction is a legitimate indicator for improving the services and strategic goals for all healthcare organizations.¹¹ However, in an underdeveloped country like ours, very few studies of this kind have been conducted. The Department of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery (ENT) is one of the eminent departments in Nepal Medical College and Teaching Hospital (NMCTH) which has been providing services for the last nineteen years. No studies have been done so far regarding the quality of services provided by the department. This study intends to assess the patient satisfaction levels in those patients attending ENT OPD.

METHODOLOGY

This was a cross sectional descriptive study conducted in NMCTH from February to April 2015. All patients more than eighteen years of age attending ENT OPD and willing to take part were recruited in the study. Patients less than 18 years were selected only if attended by guardians. In-patients, patients referred from other wards, patients coming from emergency department, patients working in health care facilities, uncooperative patients and patients with serious mental and physical illnesses like terminal disease or psychosis were excluded.

Informed consent was taken from all the study participants. Ethical approval was taken from the

Research and Ethical Sub Committee (RESC) of Nepal Medical College. Confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants were assured and maintained.

Respondents were asked about the various aspects of satisfaction in the ENT services using a structured (both closed and open ended) questionnaire, according to the Likert scale of 1 to 5 ranging from strongly agree to agree, satisfactory, disagree to strongly disagree. The items were adapted from existing instruments used in previous patient satisfaction surveys conducted abroad. The interview was done in private by a resident doctor under the supervision of the principal investigator. The hard and soft copies of the data were stored by the principal investigator and entered in Statistical Package for Social Science Version 17 (SPSS) for analysis.

RESULTS

A total of 317 patients were selected for the study of which 154 (48.6%) were males while 163 (51.4%) were females. Their ages ranged from 1 to 86 years with a mean age of 29.5±13.3 years. A majority of the participants (61.2%) fell in the age group 20 to 39 years. Out of 317 patients, a total of 311, 312 and 316 filled data for education, occupation and religion respectively. Out of 311 patients, 39.9% had received higher education, 33.4% secondary education, 6.4% had informal education and 6.4% were illiterate. Among 312 patients, 30.4% were students, 26.6% homemakers and the remaining 28.5% comprised of mechanics, businessmen and unemployed people. Out of 316 patients, 67.4% were Hindus, followed by 29.1% who were Buddhists. Residents examined 64.4% of the patients and consultants examined the remaining 35.6%.

Various aspects of services provided by ENT Out Patient Department were assessed. Overall, 74.8% of patients in the study were satisfied. Satisfaction with the facilities present in the hospital and satisfaction with the visit to the doctor were found to be 78.9% and 63.4% respectively. We observed major dissatisfaction with the registration period (52.7%) and waiting time after reaching the OPD (49.8%). The behaviour of other supporting staff of the OPD satisfied 67.8% of the patients while the billing section satisfied 57.7%. Only 55.6% of the patients were satisfied when sent to radiology department for ENT related investigations. For 63.4% of the patients, lab facilities were satisfactory and 69.5% of the patients were satisfied with procedural communications in the ENT OPD.

Table 1: Distribution of participants

VARIABLE	N	%
Age group		
<19 yrs	63	19.9
20-39 yrs	194	61.2
40-59 yrs	49	15.4
>59yrs	11	3.5
Total	317	100
Gender		
Male	154	48.6
Female	163	51.4
Total	317	100
Education		
Higher education	124	39.9
Secondary	104	33.5
Primary	43	13.8
Non formal	20	6.4
Illiterate	20	6.4
Total	311	100
Occupation		
Student	95	30.46.1
Teacher	19	8.4
Farmer	26	26.6
Homemaker	83	28.5
Others	89	100
Total	312	
Religion		
Hindu	213	92
Buddhist	1	0.3
Muslim	6	1.9
Christian	4	1.3
Others	316	100
Total	316	
Examiner		
Resident	204	64.4
Consultant	113	35.6
Total	317	100

Table 2: Level of Satisfaction with different aspects of services

VARIABLE	LEVEL OF SATISFACTION	
	Dissatisfied (%)	Satisfied (%)
Registration counter	52.7	47.3
Waiting time at the OPD	49.8	50.2
Support staff at OPD	32.2	67.8
Billing system	42.3	57.7
Radiology services	44.4	55.6
Laboratory services	36.6	63.4
Procedural communication	30.5	69.5

Table 3: Overall level of satisfaction with different variables

VARIABLE	LEVEL OF SATISFACTION	
	Dissatisfied (%)	Satisfied (%)
Overall visit	116 (36.6)	201 (63.4)
Overall facility	67 (21.1)	250 (78.9)
Overall satisfaction	80 (25.2)	237 (74.8)

Males were found to be more satisfied with the visit to the doctor (69.3% compared to 57.7% for females). P-value was 0.03 showing statistical significance. Among the various occupations, farmers were the most satisfied (80.8%) with the visit to the doctor. P-value was 0.002 which shows a very high level of statistical significance. Other variables did not have any significant association with visit to the doctor, facilities present in the hospital and overall, with regards to patient satisfaction.

Table 4: Satisfaction from overall visit with different variables

Variable	Satisfaction with overall visit		P-VALUE
	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	
Occupation			
Student	26.3%	73.7%	0.002
Teacher	21.1%	78.9%	
Farmer	19.2%	80.8%	
Homemaker	48.2%	51.8%	
Others	44.9%	55.1%	
Gender			
Male	30.70%	69.30%	0.03
Female	42.3%	57.7%	

Table 5: Level of satisfaction at various levels with the Examining doctor

Variable	Satisfaction with facility		P-VALUE
	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	
Resident	22.5%	77.5%	0.4
Consultant	18.6%	81.4%	
Satisfaction with overall visit			
Resident	32.80%	67.20%	0.06
Consultant	43.40%	56.60%	
Overall satisfaction			
Resident	25.00%	75.00%	0.89*
Consultant	25.70%	74.30%	

* p-value from Fischer Exact Test

DISCUSSION

Patients are the end consumers of the health care services and their perception of the quality of service provided is the key factor in determining the use of services.¹² Measuring patient satisfaction mainly helps to evaluate health care services from the patients' perspective, facilitate the identification of problem areas and help generate ideas towards resolving these problems.¹³

Patient satisfaction studies are common in the west. In our part of the world it is still in developing phase. Limited literature is available regarding assessment of ENT OPD services in Nepal. The overall satisfaction in our study was 74.8%. This is comparable with other similar satisfaction surveys. A study by Rizyal reported an overall satisfaction of 76.8% among patients attending eye OPD of NMCTH whereas Gurung *et al* reported 74% patient satisfaction in a tertiary eye care centre in Kathmandu.^{14,15} Similarly a study by Dahal reported a patient satisfaction of 73% in a survey conducted in the Western Zonal Hospital, Pokhara, Nepal.¹⁶ Rajbanshi *et al* found an overall patient satisfaction of 75.9% in Chitwan Medical College and a paper by Subedi reported 73.4% patient satisfaction with the hospital services at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital.^{17,18}

Many patient satisfaction studies have been carried out in India such as, studies by Qadri *et al* showing overall patient satisfaction of 79.3% in rural Haryana, Deva *et al* in Kashmir (80%), Kumari *et al* in Lucknow (81.6%), Qureshi *et al* in Kashmir (72%) and Bhattacharya *et al* (88%).¹⁹⁻²³ In Africa, Ofili reported patient satisfaction of 83% in Benin city and Iliyasu reported 83% satisfaction in Kano, Nigeria.^{24,25} Similarly a study in Ethiopia reported 77% patient satisfaction in Jimma University Specialized

Hospital.⁶ These variations in different studies could be because of the use of different satisfaction instruments, variation in the ways services were delivered, differences in the study population, socio-cultural differences and differences in levels of literacy.

Our study revealed that 78.9% were satisfied with the facilities of the hospital. This included various aspects like cleanliness, noise, crowd, signage and affordability. Rizyal also found 76.8% of the patients to be satisfied with the facilities whereas Rajbanshi et al found only 56.3% of the patients to be satisfied with the physical facilities of the hospital.^{14,17} A similar study conducted in a hospital in Kerala showed that 50% of the patients were highly satisfied with cleanliness of the OPDs.²⁶

Doctor's behaviour has the greatest effect on patient satisfaction.²⁷ In this study 63.4% patients were satisfied with visit to doctor. A study by Aldana *et al* reported patient satisfaction of 68.9% which is a comparable result but studies conducted by Acharya, Subedi and Rizyal reported higher satisfaction rates of 93.2%, 86.4% and 87.9% respectively.^{14,18,28,29} This aspect of hospital service has scope for further improvement and could establish trust among the patients. Good communication between patients and healthcare providers would help identify problems quickly and form a good doctor patient relationship which in itself is therapeutic.

The waiting time for patients was assessed at two points: one at the registration counter and the other at the OPD. Of the two, 52.7% were dissatisfied with the registration period at the counter and 49.8% with the waiting time after reaching ENT OPD. This was higher compared to 37.8% reported by Rizyal.¹⁴ Waiting time was the major factor for dissatisfaction in our study. This had a major effect in overall satisfaction as well. This is an important area which needs improvement. In our study, 67.8% patients were satisfied with the behaviour of other supporting staff of the OPD which was comparable to 66.7% reported by Subedi.¹⁸ The patients are most satisfied when they receive a courteous response from all the people involved in providing care.

Our billing system satisfied 57.7% patients whereas Subedi found 65.8% satisfied patients.¹⁸ Among the patients who were sent to Radiology department for ENT related investigations, only 55.6% patients were satisfied. In this study, 63.4% patients were satisfied with the lab facilities, which was comparable to study by Subedi in which 59% answered a good access and 68.9% reported a good ease to report.¹⁸ This calls for interdepartmental coordination and a holistic approach to providing care.

In the study, 69.5% patients were satisfied with

procedural communications in the ENT OPD whereas studies by Joshi and Acharya have reported 91% and 81.6% satisfaction with the communication skills of the clinician respectively.^{29,30} This can be improved by allotting more time for interaction with patients prior to any procedure. Males were found to be satisfied more with the visit to the doctor (69.3% compared to 57.7% for females). P value was 0.03 showing statistical significance. This was not in agreement with other studies where females were found to be more satisfied.^{17,31,32} Among the various occupations, farmers were the most satisfied (80.8%) with the visit to the doctor. P value was 0.002 which shows a very high level of significance. This could be because of lower expectation levels compared to others. Various studies showed patient satisfaction level was significantly associated with their age, educational level and socioeconomic status.^{6,17} No such significant association was seen in our study. Patients examined by consultants and residents reported comparable levels of satisfaction. Majority of the patients were Hindus followed by Buddhists. Religion also had no impact on patient satisfaction.

Patient satisfaction is an important issue in the evaluation of healthcare services and the shaping of policies to improve healthcare service provision. The overall satisfaction with the services in the ENT OPD was 74.8% which is good. However, few aspects like the waiting time, billing system and interdepartmental coordination need improvement. The major limitation of this study was that it involved a single department. A multi departmental study would give an overall picture of the quality of services provided by this tertiary centre. Patient satisfaction surveys should be carried out routinely in all aspects of health care. Getting feedback from patients is important; however, it is only useful if it is acted upon and if the changes are monitored to see if they have brought about the desired results.

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