

ABSTRACT

A research project was undertaken to evaluate the efficiency and productivity of the hospital dental services as well as the perception of patients and dentists regarding various aspects of the service. This project was conducted in two stages. Stage I was a hospital based study conducted in the Kurunegala district and comprised of a work sampling study, survey of records and a cross sectional survey of a random sample of 1305 patients attending hospital dental clinics in the district. Stage II of the project was a national mail survey of hospital dentists aimed at assessing their perceptions of the quality of the hospital dental services.

In Stage I, the work sampling study revealed that on an average working day, hospital dentists spent only 40% of their time for clinical activities. They remained idle in their clinics for 15% of the time, while they were not available in the clinic for 45% of the time. The overall efficiency of the hospital dental service was estimated to be 40%.

The survey of records disclosed that the predominant dental treatment provided in hospital clinics was extraction of teeth. The mean number of extractions per day per dentist was 14.04, while the mean number of scalings was 0.44 and the mean number of permanent fillings placed was 0.71.

Only about 50% of the patients were aware of the working hours in hospital clinics. Preventive instructions were received by less than 40% of the sample. Over 75% of the patients spent over 60 minutes as waiting time in the clinics. Over 70% of the patients reported that the dentists spent less than 5 minutes in treating them. 80 - 90 percent of the patients were satisfied with the extractions or fillings carried out in the hospital

clinics. The major reason given by those who were dissatisfied, was pain incurred by the treatment.

In Stage II of the study, 61% of the dentists responded to the questionnaire. Their responses indicated that many dentists had an unfavourable opinion regarding the quality and quantity of equipment, instruments and consumables in the clinics. Infrastructural facilities were also not as good as expected by many dentists. Many dentists were also unhappy about other aspects of hospital infrastructure including water supply, toilet facilities and availability of space. A majority of dentists felt that the supply and maintenance of equipment was unsatisfactory. The supervision of hospital dental clinics too was considered unsatisfactory by 25% of the dentists.

This study was the first definitive evaluation of the hospital dental services in Sri Lanka, which have been in existence for over 60 years. It has provided an objective profile of the hospital dental services from several perspectives, revealing several prominent shortcomings in the service.

It is likely that the results of this investigation will of considerable value to health planners and administrators in the task of improving and further developing the existing services.