

ABSTRACT

Patient satisfaction with medical care from the family physicians was studied in the District of Colombo, involving 600 patients, i.e., 60 from each of the 10 randomly selected clinics. Satisfaction was assessed in conjunction with selected aspects of the doctor-patient relationship, socio-demographic characteristics, predisposing factors of patients, organisational factors and characteristics of care providers. Patients' perception of doctors was measured on a scale, and scored accordingly, (specific satisfaction).

A pre-tested, pre-coded, interviewer administered questionnaire was used to gather data from the patients in the clinic setting. The provider characteristics were recorded using a self administered questionnaire given to the family physicians at the end of data collection from patients at their clinics.

Considering the doctor-patient relationship, the doctor giving adequate information to the patient about his health and treatment ($P=0.0009$), the time spent with the patient ($P=0.0009$), and the carefulness shown by the doctor ($P=0.008$) were associated with satisfaction regarding the provider of care.

Regarding socio-demographic factors, a significantly high proportion of patients over 45 years of age ($P=0.008$), expressed satisfaction compared to younger patients. The younger were more dissatisfied with the consultation time than the middle age group who were less satisfied than the older age group regarding the same ($P=0.009$).

Females were more dissatisfied about the information given to them by the doctor ($P=0.0001$).

Being married was associated with satisfaction regarding the provider of care ($P=0.001$), consultation time ($P=0.0001$) and the information given by the doctor ($P=0.0001$).

Race of the patient (Sinhala) was associated with satisfaction regarding the time spent on the consultation ($P=0.008$) and the information given by the doctor ($P=0.0001$).

Occupational status was associated with satisfaction regarding the information given by the doctor, the professionals being the most dissatisfied and the middle level workers being the most satisfied ($P=0.0001$).

Of the predisposing factors in the patient, satisfaction in their non-working activities ($P=0.048$) and overall satisfaction with life ($P=0.04$), were associated with satisfaction with care of their own provider.

Subsequent visits to the provider of care ($P=0.04$), attending their regular source of care ($P=0.006$), and when the period of care under that doctor exceeded 2

years ($P=0.001$) were associated with specific satisfaction.

The patient characteristics associated with 'doctor-shopping' behaviour were 36-45 years age group ($P=0.013$), female sex ($P=0.0001$), marital status (unmarried, separated, divorced and widowed, $P=0.001$) and the occupational status (professionals and unemployed $P=0.0001$).

Of the patients who by-passed the closest doctor to consult the doctor of their choice, 57.8% were efficacy of care seekers (efficacy as perceived by the patient), while 31.2% were interpersonal care seekers. The rest (11%) were a miscellaneous group who went in search of convenience, reasonable charges and because the doctor was recommended to them by others. Efficacy of care seekers were the over 45 years age group, ($P=0.0001$), married ($P=0.003$) and the males ($P=0.0001$). In contrast, the age group of 18-35 years ($P=0.0001$), the unmarried group ($P=0.0001$) and the females ($P=0.0001$) were the interpersonal care seekers.

Though female doctors were associated with patient satisfaction (considering both male and female patients as a whole, $P=0.03$) the doctor being of the same or the opposite sex as the patient was not associated with satisfaction.

There was no significant difference between the male and female doctors regarding their willingness to listen to the patient, time spent on the consultation or the information given to the patient.

Sinhala doctors were associated with satisfaction of all patients (all races considered as a whole, $P=0.0001$), but when analysing separately by the race of the patient, there was no significant difference in satisfaction expressed by the Sinhala or the Tamil patients regarding the Sinhala doctors. However, Tamil doctors were associated with the satisfaction of Tamil patients ($P=0.007$).

Qualification in the Diploma in Family Medicine was found to be associated with patient satisfaction ($P=0.03$).

Nearly 80% of the patients said that the friendliness of the doctor, convenient clinic hours, convenient clinic location as well as the reasonability of the fees charged were very important to them when they select their family physician.

The factors identified as influencing patient satisfaction will be useful in organising family practices, so as to achieve satisfactory doctor-patient relationship, as well as in the determination of future policies in private health care. More research is indicated in this field.