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Journal scan

Cheryl Rathert, Douglas R. May, Eric S. Williams, **Beyond service quality: the mediating role of patient safety perceptions in the patient experience–satisfaction relationship.** *Health Care Manage Rev*. 36 (2011) 359–368.

Patient safety has become an important strategic focus for all health-care organizations. Most patient safety research has focused on analysis of systems and processes that lead to adverse events. However, little research has examined how patients think of safety or how their perceptions might influence outcomes of care. Studies have revealed that patient perceptions of poor co-ordination of care, poor interpersonal skills and unprofessional behavior are often associated with adverse events and thus, patients experiencing service quality lapses are not only frustrated ‘Consumers’, but actually fearful of their safety. The present study was conceived to examine perceptions of patient safety among acute care patients and their relation with service quality and satisfaction. This study hypothesizes that patient safety mediates the relationship between service quality and satisfaction.

The most prevalent theoretical approach to explain patient satisfaction has been based on expectation models, that propose that patients compare their health-care experiences with what they expect. Satisfaction arises when high expectations are confirmed or low expectations are not confirmed. The present study model suggests that poor service quality may actually lead to serious negative perceptions about patient safety.

The study was carried out by using a questionnaire survey, pretested for its content validity and internal consistency on a sample of 496 patients (response rate of 35%), randomly selected from three hospitals of a particular US health system. Only adult patients (age >18 years) with a medical or surgical visit in the previous 90 days were made eligible for sampling,

whereas patients for psychiatric or maternity visit were excluded. The questionnaires have been developed around the constructs of patient satisfaction, service quality and patient safety. The data collected by the survey was subjected to statistical analysis, using multiple regression with forward selection and patient safety perceptions were found to have fully mediated the relationship between service quality and patient satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.51$, $F = 148.66$, $P < .001$).

The key findings of the study were support for the hypothesis that service quality influences patient judgments about their safety in the hospital and such safety perceptions mediate the relations between service quality and patient satisfaction, which may also have an impact on correlates of satisfaction, such as clinical outcome. The study result implies that improvement efforts that result in patients feeling safer can have significant influence on the satisfaction quotient of a hospital and all health-care organizations may need to focus on service attributes that lead to patient safety perceptions, in addition to technical quality.

The study had certain limitations of the study design being cross-sectional, thus precluding any causal inferences. A longitudinal study design to examine the mediating role of safety perceptions, when separated in time from service quality measures will add further value to the increasing patient safety literature.

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