

Increased Focus on Patient Satisfaction Not Always a Good Thing

In recent years, medical providers have spent an ever increasingly amount of time and resources on patient satisfaction, both measuring it and improving those scores. According to a recent Hastings Center Report based on a wide range of medical data, this has led to an overall improvement in patient satisfaction levels, but the story is not that simple. While that can be a good thing, too much focus on tracking and catering to patients "satisfaction" can actually be detrimental to patient's health at times.

This trend has sprung from shifts in medicine towards treating patients as customers and towards payment systems that financially reward high patient satisfaction scores. As a result, a cultural and economic shift is occurring where the pursuit of satisfaction has come to sometimes trump following simple, established medical protocols. In numerous studies patient satisfaction has been linked to improve outcomes because it ensures providers give attention to the needs of all patients and communicate more thoroughly. However, there is also evidence that high patient satisfaction can be linked to unnecessary or even harmful medical procedures. Patient's unnecessary requests are sometimes taking precedence over proper medical procedures, effectively altering doctors' behavior and reducing health outcomes.

This has happened because measuring patient satisfaction is not the same as measuring patient health. That is part of it, but surveys designed to receive high satisfaction scores have led to some misplaced measures. They also reflect whether doctors will perform requested but needless and expensive procedures, or even the quality of amenities at a facility.

Editorial: *The primary lesson from this report is that balanced priorities are key. Seeking patient satisfaction can be a beneficial part of providers' focus, but when it becomes primary it can be a problem. Patients typically do not fully understand medical procedures, so it becomes potentially dangerous when their wishes overpower established medical norms.*

Bibliography

Alexandra Junewicz and Stuart J. Youngner, "Patient-Satisfaction Surveys on a Scale of 0 to 10: Improving Health Care, or Leading It Astray?," *Hastings Center Report* 45, no. 3 (2015): 43-51