



In Our Patients' Shoes:

A Qualitative Study of Outpatient Pharmacy Staff on Service Improvement

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Introduction

Health care organizations constantly seek opportunities to improve quality of 'patient-centred care' by providing evidence of benefit in clinical outcomes and patients' best experiences. In improving service quality collectively as a department, adequate support from staff is necessary. Uncertainty and resistance towards changes exist in all staff groups due to various reasons. Sceptical staff should be influenced to be involved in improvement programs in the most impactful ways by positioning themselves in our patients' shoes. Therefore, this study was conducted to explore observations of outpatient pharmacy staff to achieve service improvement by positioning themselves as "patients".

Aim: To explore observations of outpatient pharmacy staff to achieve service improvement by positioning themselves as "patients".

Methodology

A qualitative approach was used for data collection and analysis. Data collection involved reflective feedbacks from outpatient pharmacy staff who were rotated to "disguise" as patients by sitting at the outpatient pharmacy waiting area from February 2013 to March 2013 in Singapore General Hospital. Based on their 20 minutes observation, they were to write their reflections on being a patient and suggestions for improvement.

Three principal questions were studied:

- (1) What are the positive observations from staff?
- (2) What are the negative observations from staff?
- (3) What are the suggestions for improvement from staff?

Results

In total, there were 113 positive observations, 241 negative observations and 86 suggestions for improvement collected from the two months survey. Some of the observations such as small queue display screen, insufficient seats for patients and lack of counters occupancy were repeated more than 20 times by staff. These observations can be classified into two main sections, mainly the pharmacy environment setting and pharmacy workforce efficiency.

No.	Constructive Observations (n)
A	Pharmacy Environment Setting
1	"Currently Serving Queue" display screen is too small, congested with numbers (27)
2	Insufficient seats for patients (25) Nobody sits behind pillars (Q number will be blocked) (10)
3	Noisy, enclosed place (16)
4	Too many wheelchairs waiting outside pharmacy (12)
5	TV programs not entertaining and boring (9)
B	Pharmacy Workforce Efficiency
6	Long wait at reception (5-7mins) (8) Long queue at the reception beyond the pharmacy doors (14)
7	Long interval before calling patients (up to 10 mins) and slow dispensing rate (13)
8	Not all counters occupied at all time (20)
9	Too many movements (7)
10	Confusing numbering (not in sequence and not from the designated counters) (9) Number called too fast (9)

Figure 1: The top ten constructive observations

Discussion

Staff were supportive of the initiative by committing to the survey participation. Their observations and suggestions have led to the start up of several quality improvement projects in the following:

- Special "Jump Queue" for wheelchair patients
- Mobile dispensing station to reduce the bottle neck at dispensing counters
- Home delivery service to send medications
- Upgrading of display screen with a bigger screen with added contrasting colour display

Conclusion

The survey allowed staff to gain valuable insights from patients' perspective and highlighted the need for leaders of improvement initiatives to recognize the impact of scepticism and resistance from ground staff, and to consider ways in which they can be positively engaged in change.

References

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