

IACADEMIC REVIEW

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On the basis of order № P-109-567 / 09.12.2021 of the Rector of the Medical University of Varna for my participation in the scientific jury and on the basis of Protocol N 1 /15.12.2021 / I make this review on the procedure for acquiring the educational and the scientific degree "Doctor" with candidate Ivan Rumenov Todorov at the Medical University of Varna.

The topic of the dissertation is "Patient satisfaction as a prerequisite for improving the quality of medical care and administrative services in the hospital" with supervisor Prof. Todorka Kostadinova. The work contains 164 pages and is illustrated by 33 figures and 2 tables. 132 literary sources were used, of which 27 were in Cyrillic and 105 in Latin. In connection with the dissertation, 8 scientific articles and participations in scientific forums have been published and presented.

The dissertation was presented and approved by the Department Council of the Department of Economics and Management of Health Care at the Faculty of Public Health of the Medical University - Varna on November 11, 2021.

The dissertation and the Abstract are presented in accordance with the requirements and rules of PPZRASRB and the Regulations for the development of the academic staff at the Medical University of Varna.

Brief biographical introduction

Ivan Rumenov Todorov was born on August 6, 1980 in the town of Stara Zagora. In 1999 he graduated from the State Commercial High School in Stara Zagora with a degree in Accounting and Business Administration. Until 2005 he graduated with a master's degree from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" with a specialty: Political Management, and until 2014 a master's degree at Burgas University" Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov "with a degree in

Business Management - Health Management. He worked as an Economic and Political Analyst at the Liberal Political Science Institute / NGO / in the period 2007 - 2010. After that he held the position of Senior Analyst and Consultant at Political Capital Bulgaria Ltd., the Bulgarian branch of Political Capital Policy and Research & Consulting Institute. the field of political and economic analysis, forecasts and research. Since 2010 he has held a number of managerial positions at the Dr. Shterev Medical Complex, where since 2012 he has been Chairman of the Board of Directors of the holding company. He is a member of the Management Board and is Deputy Chairman of the Bulgarian Hospital Association (<https://bba-bulgaria.com/>)

Contemporary relevance of the dissertation:

In the conditions of competition on the market of health care and care, the satisfaction of the patients from a given medical institution is of utmost importance. The professionalism of medical teams and the provision of modern equipment are leading factors in attracting patients, but the interior conditions, attitudes towards patients in need and seeking medical care are no less important and this makes it very relevant to consider the problem in a scientific paper. The Bulgarian tradition in the field of health care organization is reasonably focused on the direct medical results of the treatment of patients, with too little attention paid to the overall patient satisfaction with the diagnosis, therapy and their stay in a hospital. Given the Bulgarian and global trends in the field of health management, this dissertation offers a very up-to-date in-depth look and study on a set of factors that affect patient satisfaction with medical care and administrative care in a hospital.

Structurally, the dissertation consists of five parts. The dissertation begins with an extensive introduction describing the transition from paternalistic to patient-centered medicine in the last 30 years, the new role and self-perception of patients, the reform of modern healthcare systems and the importance of measuring patient satisfaction in new market conditions. The following is a presentation of the goals, objectives and methods of the dissertation. The first chapter examines the theoretical foundations and good practices for patient satisfaction in hospitals. The second presents a diagnostic analysis and assessment of the principles and characteristics of Bulgarian patient satisfaction, which are based on a survey conducted. The third chapter presents a set of recommendations for changes and measures in the medical institution aimed at increasing patient satisfaction. The dissertation ends with a summary conclusion, presentation of the questionnaires from their own research in the form of appendices and inventory of the used literature.

Aim and tasks of the dissertation:

The aim of the dissertation is set out in the title, and the realization of the goal is justified in four specific tasks:

- First research task: Carrying out a scientific review of the specialized literature, examining the basic concepts, principles and factors influencing patient satisfaction and the related quality of the offered medical care and non-medical care;

- Second research task: development of tools for sociological research among three groups and conducting their own research in specific hospitals in Bulgaria to define the state of the problem in our country according to the understandings of patients, doctors and managers of medical institutions;

- Third research task: on the basis of the conducted research, derivation of the factors influencing the patient satisfaction and formulation of the guidelines for increasing the satisfaction of the patients with the hospital health services and the administrative service accompanying their treatment;

- Fourth research task: Development of a set of guidelines and measures to increase patient satisfaction with hospital health services as a factor in improving the quality of hospital medical care and administrative services.

Both the main goal and the set tasks and the author's hypotheses are clearly and precisely formulated.

Evaluation of the content of the dissertation:

The first chapter presents a scientific review of the specialized literature related to the basic concepts, principles and factors influencing patient satisfaction and the related quality of medical care offered. The chapter begins with an overview of the topic of the quality of medical care and care. The author pays attention at the beginning of the definition of the term, the definitions of quality of the various authors and the relationship between professional medical care and patient satisfaction in the hospital. In the next part, the basic concepts related to the presentation of the concept of hospital patient satisfaction are presented. Serious attention was also paid to the importance of the study of patient satisfaction for the overall functioning of the health care system. A problem that still does not receive enough attention regarding the organization of the Bulgarian healthcare system. Based on the literature review, the main factors according to the researchers of the topic that directly affect patient satisfaction are identified, and in addition to medical, technological, interpersonal, image, administrative, communication and moral factors are also indicated. The author continues the

theoretical review by presenting good practices from medical institutions in different countries. Here I would like to point out a weakness in the author's approach, because it is not entirely clear on what basis the selection of the presented good practices was made and why exactly these examples from the presented medical institutions have entered the literature review. Despite this weakness, the chapter concludes with a useful summary of the main conclusions of the review of the literature on patient satisfaction. Regarding the theoretical review, I can confidently say that I. Todorov easily structures and presents the data from numerous studies on the topic of patient satisfaction. The presentation of the theoretical overview is generally subordinated to the general direction of the dissertation and ends with conclusions and summaries that allow to make a transition to the empirical part in the next second chapter.

The second chapter presents in analytical form the results of conducted own sociological research through a survey method. Its aim is to present a diagnostic analysis and assessment of the principles and characteristics of the Bulgarian patient's satisfaction with the received medical care. The analysis is based on summarizing the data and problematizing the results of our own research by conducting written surveys among three groups of respondents - patients, health manager and doctors. Through the results of the research the author successfully analyzes the specifics of understanding three types of participants in the organization and conduct of the healing process in relation to three groups of topics. The first is related to the channels of communication in case of need for medical information and selection of a medical institution. The second, with the factors influencing the patient's choice of a particular hospital. The third is aimed at deriving the principles on which the feeling of satisfaction of patients is based according to themselves, according to their doctors and according to the managers and managers of medical institutions for hospital care. The obtained results are presented precisely in tabular and graphical form, are illustrated with appropriate findings, the more significant regularities that prove the author's hypotheses are emphasized. This gives me reason to say that I. Todorov has the necessary skills for analysis and interpretation of results, and his dissertation fully meets the requirements for obtaining the PhD educational and scientific degree.

The author describes in detail the design of his own survey, and in an appendix presents the content of the questionnaires. The total of 462 surveyed patients, health managers and doctors included in the study provides a basis for objectivity and representativeness of the results obtained. As a doctor and manager in the field of healthcare with over 50 years of experience, I cannot help but be impressed by a weakness of the survey and it is related to the

fact that as respondents it does not include another extremely important group of participants in diagnostic -the treatment process, namely health care professionals (nurses and midwives). This lack in no way reduces the quality of the conclusions analyzed as a result of the study, but would only enrich our understanding of the principles and characteristics of patient satisfaction by another important participant in the process of providing medical care and assistance.

Very valuable from a research point of view is the ranking by weight of the factors influencing patient satisfaction, which the author makes at the end of the second chapter. Ultimately, the results of the study show that patient satisfaction depends not only on medical outcomes, such as the a priori understanding of the issue, but on a set of factors. Leading among them are the quality of medical care, courteous and attentive attitude of medical and administrative staff and hospital infrastructure, the interior environment and the provision of equipment. As I. Todorov concludes, the good balance between these factors allows a medical institution to take care of and serve its patients well and to achieve high levels of their satisfaction.

Looking at the results of the survey, one of the main questions that impressed me was that the ranking of the polite and attentive attitude of medical and administrative staff as a factor almost equal in severity to the quality of medical care can create a serious problem. It is related to the fact that the good attitude and trained communication and interpersonal skills of the medical and administrative teams in a hospital can mask the poor-quality medical results for patients in determining their sense of satisfaction with the care and service received. For me, as a doctor for whom solving the patient's medical problem is of paramount importance, this disguise is a serious weakness. However, the author has grasped this problem and has come to the very adequate conclusion that although the quality of medical care cannot be adequately assessed by patients in the short term, it has a huge impact in the long run as a factor in their satisfaction. I. Todorov rightly concludes that in a short period of time a medical institution can maintain satisfied patients without good medical results based on good service, good attitude towards them and comfortable conditions. In the long run, however, it is the good doctors and the good medical results that make patients have a positive attitude towards the hospital and recommend it to their relatives and acquaintances as a good place for their possible treatment.

Based on the review of the scientific literature and based on the results of research conducted among patients, doctors and health managers in the third chapter, the author draws several main conclusions and based on them presents a comprehensive set of specific

recommendations and measures through which the management of a hospital can have a positive impact on patient assessments and satisfaction, and hence improve the overall quality of medical care and administrative care provided. They are aimed at improving the medical organization and health care, the administrative and non-medical services, the communication and relations with the patients, the internal environment and the medical infrastructure and at increasing the motivation of the staff in the medical institution. It is noteworthy that all measures are extremely practical and can be applied in daily activities in the organization of medical and administrative processes in a hospital. Of course, based on his expertise, the author has limited himself to organizational and administrative aspects of the activity, without going into purely medical algorithms and processes. The exceptional value of the proposed set of proposals is, as the author reports, that a significant part of them have been introduced in practice in the hospital where he works, received approbation and led to a positive result in improving administrative services and organization of medical care. for the patients of the medical institution in order to increase their overall level of satisfaction.

Opinion on the personal contribution of the PhD student:

One of the main contributions of the doctoral student and his dissertation is that it helps to develop a basic understanding of the factors and principles that affect patient satisfaction. To the incomparably most important, in my opinion, provided professional help to the needy, the study clearly shows that it is not enough for the positive perceptions of patients when there is a lack of attention to them. The author's in-depth assessment of the severity of the various factors influencing patient satisfaction in Bulgaria and the presented order of these factors in order of importance is very valuable. In addition to the practical benefit, the presented set of recommendations, measures and improvements in the medical institution to increase patient satisfaction, some of which are practically tested. All this, as the author points out, gives us reason to believe that the conclusions and recommendations proposed in this dissertation will be useful not only in terms of theoretical understandings of patient satisfaction, but also for the practical work of hospital managers in Bulgaria to improve the activities of the medical institutions managed by them.

Critical remarks on the dissertation:

The first remark is on a terminological issue in the theoretical review. I believe that the term "continuity of medical care" used is borrowed from the English term continuity of care and in Bulgarian means "the consistent transition from one to another, using what has been

done before." Of course, the term can be used in the way presented in the dissertation, as "continuity" of care provided to a particular patient. However, I believe that a more comprehensible use of continuity of care in Bulgarian should be "good medical practice", which is clear rules and algorithms for medical behavior, proposed by the Bulgarian Medical Union (BMU) and approved by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Bulgaria with the same meaning as the English term.

My second remark, as I have already noted above, is related to the absence of a group of healthcare professionals (nurses and midwives) among the respondents to their own survey. Incorporating an analysis of the views of these important players in the organization of medical processes in a hospital would only enrich the understanding of the principles and characteristics of patient satisfaction.

Of course, both remarks do not diminish the value and usefulness of the present dissertation, but would only improve its overall presentation.

A conclusion:

The dissertation assigned to me for review was developed under the guidance of an erudite specialist in the field of economics and healthcare management Prof. Todorka Kostadinova. I highly appreciate the dissertation, based on the numerous data contained in it, published in specialized publications, important conclusions from my own research and the set of practical measures and improvements.

I would like to recommend to the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury to vote positively for the award of PhD educational and scientific degree to Ivan Rumenov Todorov, PhD student in in the postgraduate program "Organization and management outside the field of material production /Healthcare/", professional field 3.7 Administration and management at the Medical University of Varna.

January 15, 2022

Reviewer:

Prof. Atanas Shterev

