

AN EVALUATION OF ADHERENCE TO THE PATIENTS RIGHTS CHARTER AMONG PATIENTS AND PHYSICIANS AT THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT OF IMAM KHOMEINI HOSPITAL, TEHRAN

¹SEYYED HASSAN EMAMI RAZAVI, ²NARJES ASADI KHALILI, ²ALIASGHAR SAIIDI,
³FATEMEH SHIDFAR

¹Medical Ethics and History of Medicine Research Center, Department of Surgery of Imam Khomeini Hospital, Tehran University of Medical Science, ²Faculty of Social sciences, Tehran University, ³ Medical Ethics and History of Medicine Research Center, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran.

ABSTRACT

It is the cherished goal of the health care providers to observe the patient rights. An official order to install the patient rights charter in all crowded places of hospitals motivated us to evaluate the patient rights both from the patients' and resident points of view.

This is a descriptive survey with cross-sectional method. The research was conducted to examine the patients and residents awareness of the contents of "Patients' Rights Charter" in emergency department of Imam Khomeini hospital in Tehran and their views on the adherence of the cares to the articles of the charter. 140 patients and 70 residents were chosen by simple randomized method by Cochran formula and the data was gathered by questionnaires.

57.9% of patients were not aware of this announcement. 78% of patients believed that patients' rights is being carried out relatively. 88.6% of residents believed that they complied with the rights of patients. The patients were relatively satisfied with the nursing cares, medical services and hospital equipments (69% were satisfied with availability of physicians in necessary situations, 47% satisfied with the nursing cares and 93.6% satisfied with the hospital equipments).

Two years after installation of the charter, patients and residents awareness of installation were low. According to the patient views, patients' rights were relatively adhered. Unawareness of patients of their rights may limit their expectations from physicians and if they become aware of the contents of charter, their satisfaction from current situation may alter.

Key words: Patient rights, Patient rights charter, Residents, Patients.

INTRODUCTION

The patient rights and the issue of adherence to it are as old as the medicine by itself. Hippocrates has emphasized the importance of the observance of patient rights by his pupils in his oath. Later oaths and principles of medical ethics which developed along with progression of medical sciences, included the physician – patient relationship, and likewise medical legal codes have taken this aspect into consideration (1).

Since 1970, following the social and cultural supports of human rights throughout the world, a progressive tendency to support various aspects of patient rights has been commenced (2).

Since this evolution, an awareness of patient rights by the health care providers on one hand and the lawyers on the other hand has been emphasized, and attempts have been made to make the patients familiar to their rights (1).

Fista says: "patients are admitted to hospitals because of problems in their well being and disability to attend to their own needs." (3) In addition to apparent pains and problems, the patients also have emotional and psychological problems which lead to difficulties in expressing their needs (4).

The hospitals are usually uncomfortable places with no similarity to the activities of the patients' routine lives (5). The patients' vulnerability may lead to changes and weaknesses in their body systems (6).

In addition, increase in society knowledge about health topics, diseases and expenses has led to more claims by patients and more involvement of people in their health cares. Patients expect that hospitals to be completely responsible for all their medical services (7). When the patients'

Correspondence: S. H. Emami Razavi, Department of Surgery, Keshavarz Blv., Imam Khomeini hospital, Tehran, Iran, Email: emamiraz@sina.tums.ac.ir

expectations are not observed they would complain (8). Therefore, the hospitals and medical centers must improve the quality of services on the basis of patient rights.

It is stated in the "Georgia Comprehensive Patient Protection Act" that any effort in improving the quality of health care must be done by taking the patients' opinions into consideration (9).

In Iran, one of the activities in this regard, was the translation and compilation of the Patient Rights Charter by the Health ministry in 2001, and an order to all the hospitals to install it in all the wards. But lack of follow up on the part of the inspection bodies in the implementation of the charter, and failure in its incorporation as a criterion for yearly assessment of quality control has resulted in non implementation of the contents of the charter.

As one of the main complaints of patients is the relationship between the patients and health care providers, we decided to do this research to assess the awareness of patients and residents about the contents of charter and their views on patient rights observance.

METHODS

This is a descriptive and cross sectional survey that has been conducted to evaluate the awareness of patients and residents about the contents of patient rights charter and their views on the extent of observance of the patient rights in Imam Khomeini hospital in 2004.

The sample size was calculated according to the Cochran formula (10) as 140 patients and 70 residents. They were selected by simple random sampling.

The information was gathered by the means of questionnaires. The questionnaires were designed to be completed by researchers from patients admitted to emergency department of Imam Khomeini hospital and residents of the department. Two distinct questionnaires were designed, one exclusively for the patients and other for residents. The patients' and residents' questionnaires included 33 & 26 questions respectively. Questions included demographic factors, patient satisfaction regarding physicians and nurses' roles in patient's care, and their awareness of the announcement of the charter and its contents.

To determine the scientific validity of questionnaires, the method of content validity was utilized. After searching the articles, a primary format of questionnaire was designed and it was sent to 15 specialists to evaluate it.

Evaluation of validity was done by the method of Cronbach Alpha. Finally, the data gathered by questionnaires were statistically analyzed by SPSS.

RESULTS

The majority of the patients admitted to emergency department (81%) were from urban areas. Sixty seven percent of patients were male and 72% of them were in the range of 21-45 years old. The education level of 69% of patients was below high school. Half of the physicians were between 20-30 years old. The number of male and female physicians was similar. The majority of patients (57.9%) were not aware to the announcement of the charter. Seventy eight percent of patients believed that the health care providers carry out their rights relatively but when they were questioned about the charter, more than 76% of the patients mentioned that the contents of the charter were not being implemented by the health care providers.

Patient's satisfaction of nursing care quality showed that 47% of the patients were satisfied with the therapeutic cares offered by nurses.

Transferring information to the patients about the complications of prescribed drugs showed that 65.2% of patients mentioned that physicians did not explain enough about drugs complications.

Regarding physicians' availability in the needed circumstances, the majority of the patients (69%) believed the physicians were available.

Seventy percent of the patients said that physicians paid enough attention during their treatments.

Fifty five percent of patients were satisfied with the length of time that they were waiting to be visited by the physician.

Fifty four percent of the patients believed the physicians gave enough instructions about the disease treatment when they were discharged.

Sixty five percent of the patients were satisfied with the facility and rapidity of the file formation at the time of admission.

The patients' satisfaction rate was 93% regarding the availability of medical equipments, 75% regarding the hospital laboratory services, 64% regarding the hospital pharmacy services and 92% regarding the quality of foods.

Sixty one percent of patients were dissatisfied with the welfare facilities of hospital such as clothing, wheel chairs and water chiller system. Fifty six percent of patients believed the physicians did not pay much attention to their peace and privacy. (Table 1)

Table 1. Adherence to the patient's rights charter in patients view

1-awareness to the announcement of the charter	57.9% were not aware
2-Implementation of the contents of the charter by the health care providers	76% said no implementation
3-Patients satisfaction of nursing care quality	47% were satisfied
4-Physicians' explanation about drugs complications	65.2% said physicians don't explain
5-physicians' availability in the needed circumstances	69% were satisfied
6-physicians' attention while treating patients	70% were satisfied
7-duration that were kept waiting to be visited by the physician.	55% were satisfied
8-given instructions about the disease treatment when they were discharged.	54% said physicians gave instructions
9-Patients' satisfaction with facility and rapidity of file formation at the time of admission.	65% were satisfied
10-patients' satisfaction with availability of medical equipments	93% were satisfied
11-Patients' satisfaction with hospital laboratory services	75% were satisfied
12-Patients' satisfaction with hospital pharmacy services	64% were satisfied
13-patients' satisfaction with quality of food.	92% were satisfied
14-Patients' satisfaction with welfare facilities of hospital such as clothing, wheel chairs and water chiller system	61% were dissatisfied
15-physicians attention to their peace and privacy	56% said they don't pay attention

Physicians' knowledge of patients' rights showed that only 14.3% of them fully knew about the patients' rights and 48% knew moderately, but 88.6% of them believed that they complied with the patients' rights.

Satisfaction of physicians with their professional career showed that only 4.4% of them were completely satisfied and 41% of them had a moderate satisfaction.

Physicians view on the observance of their rights in hospitals showed 94.3% of them believed in nonobservance of their rights.

Twenty five percent of physicians made the therapeutic decisions with the collaboration of patients and their accompanying persons in most

cases and 38% of them did it some cases.

If the patients requested not to be examined by medical students, only 18% of the physicians accepted their request willingly and 31.3% of them accepted the patients requests in some cases.

In the cases of verbal encounters among patients and physicians, the majority of physicians said that they try to remain patient and calm and just 10% of them said they would react reciprocally.

Twenty percent of physicians believed that the facilities and equipments of hospital were not totally sufficient, 42.9% of them believed the hospital facilities were completely sufficient. (Table 2)

Table 2. Adherence to the patients' rights charter in physicians view

1-awareness to the announcement of the charter	80% were aware
2-collaboration of patients and their accompanying persons in the process of making decision for treatment.	25% made decision with the collaboration of patients and their accompanying persons in most cases
3-patients request not to be examined by medical students,	20% accepted the request willingly
4-verbal encounters among patients and physicians	90% of physicians would remain patient
5-Satisfaction of physicians about their professional career	53% were dissatisfied
6-Physicians view on the observance of their rights in hospitals	94% believed about nonobservance
7-compliance of the patients' rights charter	88% believed they complied the charter
8-The sufficiency of the facilities and equipments of hospital	20% believed totally nonsufficient

DISCUSSION

The rights of the patients admitted to the hospital must be the prime concern of all health care providers. This research has been done to assess the awareness of patients' rights charter's contents and the degree of its implementation.

Among the residents, just 14.3% of them knew the contents of the charter completely. 88.6% of them believed they were complying with the charter completely. A survey done in 2001 (11) to assess the physicians' and nurses' awareness of the charter showed the highest knowledge among physicians as 71% and among nurses as 58%. According to the results of this research, the majority of physicians claimed to abide by the charter's contents despite having an inadequate knowledge of it.

65.2% of patients contended that physicians didn't explain enough about the therapy, drugs and complications.

In a survey to evaluate the extent of adherence to patients' rights in 1996 (12), it was found that 4.32% of patients thought the information given by physicians was not enough. 59% of patients even didn't know that the charter was announced and the awareness of the charter contents was low.

Awareness is supposed to be one of the basic rights of patients (6).

The physicians, as the main authority of health system, have the power to support and defend the health care providers' rights against the patients' claims.

Patients' awareness of their rights may lead to progressive claims that can limit the authority of physicians. Therefore sometimes the physicians act in a way as if to withhold all the information to patients. It is said (13) physicians accept all the patients' rights but they don't accept patients' right to look up their files.

This preliminary study shows that adherence to patients' rights by physicians in patients' view is relatively accepted.

Adherence to patients' rights by health care providers needs an adequate education of both groups of physicians and patients.

The relative satisfaction of patients may be a result of their unawareness to the patients' rights charter (57.9%). If they become aware to their rights completely, then their expectations may extend.

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