

Perceptions of quality and satisfaction with primary healthcare in Ukraine

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IMPACT STATEMENT

Health policies at all levels (national, regional, and facility) need adequate instruments to measure and maintain healthcare quality based on the fact that quality is a major component of health system performance, and quality improvement is an important aim of health policy.

Ukraine is experiencing a transition from central budgeting to capitation financing, from the Semashko model of healthcare organization to managerial autonomy and free choice of healthcare provider. At the same time, there is a lack of evidence on healthcare quality perceptions by different stakeholders. Quality assurance procedures, though legally well-developed, are somewhat chaotic and lack focus on patients.

This dissertation provides evidence on perceptions of quality and satisfaction with primary healthcare in Ukraine. Insight into how primary healthcare managers perceive quality is important for the ongoing reform as well as for the improvement of medical services. At the same time, evidence on healthcare users' perceptions of quality is important for future system changes. This dissertation focuses on quality perceptions in Ukraine. However, the analysis of our results and their implications is also applicable in the broader contexts: to the countries with similar health systems experiencing similar transitions.

Contribution relevant to healthcare providers

As argued in this dissertation, knowing users' perceptions of healthcare quality helps to tailor the services, forming the satisfaction and loyalty of the users to the facility, and as a result, financial success.

Our results show the need to revise the quality assessment practices at the facility level. Our results also encourage the inclusion of satisfaction into quality measures as it helps to measure the aspects of healthcare that healthcare users truly value.

Furthermore, quality management at the facility level influences health system responsiveness, among other factors. Healthcare users tend to extrapolate their satisfaction and dissatisfaction with quality of services received in a facility to the health system in general.

Contribution relevant to policy makers

As argued in this dissertation, a clear consensus about quality assessment and how to measure it is needed in Ukraine. Education and clear messages on the quality of healthcare from the Ministry of Health of Ukraine are important in developing this consensus. What is still absent from the system is a national policy on healthcare quality and a national quality strategy for healthcare.

The healthcare financial reform (2017-2020) in Ukraine triggered discussions about quality. It also cleared the weak points in medical training and Continuing Professional Development concerning quality management. Firstly, quality and management are not adequately addressed in medical training programs. Secondly, before 2015, only medical doctors were appointed as medical managers. Thus, they had to take the managerial disciplines within their Continuing Professional Development (CPD) framework. Thirdly, the CPD programs are mostly outdated as well as suffer from a lack of English language skills among the participants. Thus, it is difficult for healthcare managers to update their knowledge about quality as the international sources are largely inapplicable.

The studies for this dissertation were performed in close collaboration with the Ukrainian-Swiss Project "Medical Education Development". To address the need for more up-to-date training for healthcare managers, the Ukrainian-Swiss project "Medical Education Development" developed online courses, among which there is also a "Quality Management in Healthcare" course. The course made use of and disseminated the results of the studies included in this dissertation. The "Quality Management in Healthcare" course was also developed for the Master's program on healthcare management at the Ukrainian Catholic University (Lviv, Ukraine) as well as at the National University "Kyiv Mohyla Academy" (Kyiv, Ukraine).

Although some improvements have been made in healthcare financing reform, the health system still lacks a national policy and dialog on quality and a national quality strategy for healthcare. The development and promotion of a national policy on quality and a national quality strategy for healthcare should become one of the priorities of the healthcare sector. Moreover, there is a need to develop a national policy on quality and a national quality strategy for healthcare that incorporates quality aspects important to patients to make the health system more responsive to the needs and expectations of healthcare users.

Contribution to society

The societal impact of this dissertation lies in showing healthcare users the importance of the active role of a patient, also expressed in the form of participation in satisfaction surveys.

As argued in this dissertation, a long history of paternalistic doctor-patient relationships in Ukrainian healthcare did not leave space for patients' perceptions or satisfaction. In such a model, the patient is rather passive, whereas the medical doctor's authority and expertise are absolute. The ongoing reform of healthcare financing is changing many aspects of healthcare delivery in Ukraine. In particular, the doctor-patient relationship is changing from a paternalistic to a more egalitarian relation. Under such conditions, healthcare users also learn to express their satisfaction.

The results of satisfaction surveys used to tailor the services on a facility level and to show the importance of patients' issues to policy makers have the potential to influence the health system in general, making it more responsive.

At the same time, the online course “Quality Management in Healthcare” became popular among healthcare providers. Thus, introducing the quality management instruments learned during the course might improve quality in healthcare facilities, leading to patient satisfaction with the services received in these facilities.

Contribution to research

This dissertation is unique in exploring the perceptions of several groups of health system stakeholders in Ukraine. Specifically, we analyzed the responses of primary healthcare managers who are also medical doctors and nurse administrators, as well as primary care users. The scientific impact of this dissertation also lies in the contribution to the existing knowledge about quality perceptions and important quality attributes for healthcare managers and users in the country, changing the focus of its health system, as well as the possible impact of healthcare financial reforms on general satisfaction with healthcare quality.

This dissertation is based on the combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods following the systematic literature review. The scientific impact of this dissertation also lies in reporting on the application of the difference-in-differences method to repeated cross-sectional data analysis after matching. This technique has recently been developed, and applications to different contexts are important to demonstrate its usefulness.