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Communication, Patient Participation, and Informed Consent as Indicators of the Quality of Hospital Healthcare

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Abstract

Background: The quality of healthcare is increasingly assessed through patients' experiences and perceptions. The contemporary concept of patient-centered healthcare emphasizes the importance of effective communication, patient involvement in decision-making, respect for patient autonomy, and the provision of individualized care.

Objective: The aim of this study was to assess hospitalized patients' perceptions of the quality of hospital healthcare, with particular emphasis on communication with healthcare professionals, access to information, participation in decision-making, informed consent, and privacy protection.

Methods: A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted among 100 hospitalized patients at the Cantonal Hospital "Dr. Irfan Ljubijankić" in Bihać. Data were collected using an anonymous questionnaire specifically designed for the purposes of this study and analyzed using descriptive statistical methods.

Results: Participation in treatment-related decision-making was reported by 76% of respondents, while 79% stated that their wishes and opinions were respected during treatment. Informed consent prior to medical procedures was confirmed by 90% of respondents, and 79% positively evaluated the protection of their privacy. The lowest-rated aspect of healthcare was related to organizational and infrastructural conditions of hospitalization, with 52% of respondents expressing dissatisfaction with this component of healthcare services.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that communication with healthcare professionals, patient involvement in decision-making, and adequate

information provision are essential components of high-quality hospital healthcare. Although interpersonal aspects of care were generally evaluated positively, the results highlight the need for improvements in organizational and infrastructural conditions in order to enhance overall patient satisfaction.

Keywords: *patient-centered care; healthcare quality; communication; informed consent; patient participation; patient satisfaction*

Introduction

The quality of healthcare is no longer assessed solely through the effectiveness of diagnostic and therapeutic procedures, but also through patients' experiences during treatment. The contemporary concept of patient-centered healthcare emphasizes respect for patients' needs, values, and rights, as well as their active involvement in decisions concerning their own health [1,2].

Communication between healthcare professionals and patients represents one of the most important components of quality healthcare. Clear and understandable communication contributes to a better understanding of disease and treatment, strengthens patients' trust, and facilitates the establishment of an effective therapeutic relationship. In contrast, inadequate information and poor communication may lead to uncertainty, dissatisfaction, and reduced patient cooperation during treatment [1,3,4].

Patients' right to information forms the foundation of their active participation in the treatment process. Well-informed patients are better able to understand their health condition, available tre-

atment options, and potential risks associated with medical interventions. In this context, informed consent occupies a central role and is now regarded not only as a legal and ethical requirement but also as an important form of communication between patients and healthcare professionals [5,6].

Modern healthcare is increasingly based on the concept of shared decision-making, which promotes a partnership between patients and healthcare professionals. This approach enables patients to actively participate in selecting treatment options and contributes to greater satisfaction with care, improved understanding of medical recommendations, and increased trust in the healthcare system [7–9].

In addition to communication and patient participation, respect for privacy and dignity represents an important indicator of healthcare quality. Hospitalization is often associated with uncertainty, anxiety, and an increased need for support, making the protection of privacy and recognition of individual patient needs essential for maintaining a sense of security and satisfaction during treatment [10].

Although the principles of patient-centered healthcare are increasingly promoted within contemporary healthcare systems, their implementation in everyday hospital practice may be limited by organizational, staffing, and infrastructural challenges. Evidence regarding the experiences of hospitalized patients in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains relatively limited, particularly with respect to communication with healthcare professionals, participation in decision-making, and the realization of patients' rights during treatment [11].

Therefore, the aim of this study was to assess hospitalized patients' perceptions of the quality of hospital healthcare through the evaluation of communication with healthcare professionals, patient information, informed consent, privacy protection, and involvement in treatment-related decision-making.

Materials and Methods

A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted among hospitalized patients at the Cantonal Hospital "Dr. Irfan Ljubijankić" in Bihać. The aim of the study was to assess patients' percepti-

ons of the quality of hospital healthcare through the evaluation of communication with healthcare professionals, access to information, informed consent, involvement in decision-making, and respect for privacy during hospitalization.

A total of 100 respondents were included in the study. The majority of the sample consisted of hospitalized patients (90%), while the remaining 10% were parents or legal guardians of hospitalized minor patients.

Data were collected using an anonymous questionnaire developed specifically for the purposes of this study. The questionnaire included items related to respondents' sociodemographic characteristics, as well as their experiences and perceptions regarding communication with healthcare professionals, access to information about their disease and treatment, informed consent, participation in decision-making, respect for privacy and dignity, satisfaction with hospitalization conditions and healthcare facility infrastructure, and awareness of basic patient rights.

Prior to completing the questionnaire, all respondents were informed about the purpose of the study. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of medical research and the provisions of the Declaration of Helsinki. All participants received information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study, and confidentiality and anonymity of the collected data were ensured.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Categorical variables were presented as absolute and relative frequencies (n, %), while the results were summarized in tables and interpreted descriptively. The analysis focused on key indicators of healthcare quality, including communication with healthcare professionals, access to information, participation in decision-making, informed consent, respect for privacy, and satisfaction with the infrastructural conditions of the healthcare institution.

Results

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 100 respondents hospitalized at the Cantonal Hospital “Dr. Irfan Ljubijankić” in Bihać participated in the study. Patients accounted for 90% of the sample, while parents or legal guardians of hospitalized patients accounted for 10%.

The mean age of respondents was 47 years. The most represented age group was 41–60 years (63%), followed by the 21–40 years age group (17%) and respondents older than 60 years (15%). Respondents younger than 21 years accounted for 5% of the sample.

Regarding educational attainment, the largest proportion of respondents had completed secondary education (52%), while 28% had attained higher education. Lower educational attainment was reported by 20% of respondents.

Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristic	n (%)
Patients	90 (90.0)
Parents/guardians	10 (10.0)
41–60 years	63 (63.0)
21–40 years	17 (17.0)
>60 years	15 (15.0)
16–20 years	4 (4.0)
<16 years	1 (1.0)
Secondary education	52 (52.0)
Higher education	28 (28.0)
Lower educational level	20 (20.0)

Communication with Healthcare Professionals

The analysis of communication-related aspects of healthcare revealed predominantly positive per-

ceptions among respondents. Positive communication experiences with healthcare professionals during hospitalization were reported by 68% of respondents, whereas 32% expressed dissatisfaction with this aspect of care.

Timeliness of healthcare services received the highest rating, with 80% of respondents stating that examinations and medical procedures were performed on time. Adequate time for examinations and communication with healthcare professionals was reported by 76% of respondents.

Information regarding disease and treatment was positively evaluated by 69% of respondents, while the same percentage positively assessed the courtesy and professionalism of healthcare staff. Negative evaluations of these aspects were reported by 31% of respondents.

Patient Participation and Informed Consent

The results demonstrated a high level of patient involvement in the treatment process. Participation in treatment-related decision-making was reported by 76% of respondents, while 79% stated that their wishes and opinions were respected during treatment.

The highest proportion of positive responses was recorded for informed consent. Prior to medical procedures or therapeutic interventions, informed consent had been obtained from 90% of respondents, whereas 10% reported that such consent had not been requested.

Respect for privacy during hospitalization was positively evaluated by 79% of respondents, while one-fifth of respondents considered their privacy to be inadequately protected.

Table 2. Indicators of Communication with Healthcare Professionals

Variable	Positive response n (%)	Negative response n (%)
Positive communication with healthcare staff	68 (68.0)	32 (32.0)
Sufficient information about illness	69 (69.0)	31 (31.0)
Sufficient time for examination	76 (76.0)	24 (24.0)
Examination performed on time	80 (80.0)	20 (20.0)
Courtesy and professionalism of staff	69 (69.0)	31 (31.0)

Table 3. Patient Participation and Informed Consent

Variable	Yes n (%)	No n (%)
Participation in decision making	76 (76.0)	24 (24.0)
Respect for patients' wishes	79 (79.0)	21 (21.0)
Informed consent	90 (90.0)	10 (10.0)
Respect for privacy	79 (79.0)	21 (21.0)

Key Indicators of Healthcare Quality

Comparison of the analyzed indicators revealed that informed consent (90%), timeliness of healthcare services (80%), respect for privacy (79%), and respect for patients' wishes (79%) received the most favorable evaluations.

Conversely, the lowest ratings were observed for overall communication with healthcare professionals (68%) and information provided regarding illness and treatment (69%). The greatest dissatisfaction was associated with the infrastructural conditions of the healthcare institution, where only 48% of respondents reported satisfaction.

Table 4. Key Indicators of Healthcare Quality

Indicator	Positive response n (%)
Informed consent	90 (90.0)
Examination performed on time	80 (80.0)
Respect for privacy	79 (79.0)
Respect for patients' wishes	79 (79.0)
Sufficient time for examination	76 (76.0)
Participation in decision-making	76 (76.0)
Sufficient information about illness	69 (69.0)
Courtesy and professionalism of staff	69 (69.0)
Positive communication with healthcare staff	68 (68.0)
Satisfaction with infrastructure	48 (48.0)

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that hospitalized patients generally reported positive perceptions of communication with healthcare professionals, informed consent, respect for privacy, and participation in treatment-related decision-making. Informed consent received the highest

positive rating (90%), whereas satisfaction with the infrastructural and organizational conditions of hospitalization was the lowest-rated aspect of healthcare quality (48%). These findings suggest that patients evaluate healthcare quality not only through clinical outcomes but also through interpersonal, ethical, and organizational dimensions of care.

In the present study, 68% of respondents reported positive experiences regarding communication with healthcare professionals, 69% considered the information provided about their health condition and treatment to be adequate, and 76% believed that sufficient time had been devoted to examinations and communication. Furthermore, 69% of respondents positively evaluated the courtesy and professionalism of healthcare staff. Although these results indicate generally favorable perceptions of communication, the fact that approximately one-third of respondents expressed dissatisfaction highlights the need for continuous improvement in this area. Notably, satisfaction with communication was lower than satisfaction with informed consent and participation in decision-making, suggesting that while formal aspects of patient rights are largely respected, everyday communication remains an area requiring further attention.

The importance of effective communication has been widely documented in the literature. Street et al. reported that communication between healthcare professionals and patients contributes to a better understanding of illness, improved decision-making, and greater trust in the healthcare system [4]. Similarly, Kwame and Petrucka emphasized that effective communication encompasses empathy, emotional support, active listening, and respect for individual patient needs [1]. More recent evidence has demonstrated that patient-centered communication positively influences trust and overall satisfaction with healthcare services [12]. The findings of the present study further support the view that communication is a fundamental component of patient-centered healthcare and a key determinant of perceived healthcare quality.

The highest proportion of positive responses in this study was related to informed consent, which was confirmed by 90% of respondents. This finding indicates that most patients were adequately informed and actively involved before undergoing

medical procedures or therapeutic interventions. Informed consent is widely recognized as one of the principal indicators of respect for patient autonomy and ethical medical practice. Akkad et al. found that patients perceive informed consent as an important component of communication, particularly when the nature of the procedure, expected outcomes, and potential risks are clearly explained [13]. Likewise, Hall et al. argued that informed consent should not be viewed merely as a formal administrative requirement but rather as a continuous communication process between healthcare professionals and patients [6]. The high level of positive responses observed in this study may therefore reflect a relatively successful implementation of patient autonomy principles in routine hospital practice.

Patient participation in treatment-related decision-making was reported by 76% of respondents, while 79% stated that their wishes and preferences were respected during treatment. These findings indicate that most patients were not merely passive recipients of healthcare services but active participants in their own care. Active patient involvement is considered a core principle of contemporary patient-centered healthcare.

The present findings are consistent with those reported by Siebinga et al., who demonstrated that patient-centered communication and shared decision-making significantly contribute to patient satisfaction [7]. The importance of patient participation is further supported by the systematic review conducted by Shay and Lafata, which concluded that shared decision-making improves patients' understanding of treatment options, enhances satisfaction, and strengthens the relationship between healthcare professionals and patients [9]. These findings are also aligned with the perspective of Barry and Edgman-Levitan, who identified shared decision-making as one of the defining characteristics of patient-centered healthcare [8].

Respect for privacy during hospitalization was positively evaluated by 79% of respondents. Although this represents a relatively high level of satisfaction, one in five respondents reported concerns regarding the protection of privacy. This finding underscores the importance of privacy and dignity as essential components of healthcare quality that require continuous attention from he-

althcare professionals. Similar conclusions were reported by Akyüz and Erdemir, who identified privacy as one of the most important indicators of respect for patient dignity during healthcare delivery [10]. According to their findings, adequate privacy protection contributes to feelings of security, trust, and satisfaction with care. The results of the present study support these observations and further demonstrate that healthcare quality extends beyond the successful completion of medical procedures.

The least favorable evaluations in this study were related to the infrastructural and organizational conditions of hospitalization. Only 48% of respondents expressed satisfaction with healthcare infrastructure, while 52% reported dissatisfaction. Unlike communication-related and ethical aspects of healthcare, where positive evaluations predominated, infrastructure was the only domain in which dissatisfaction exceeded satisfaction. This finding suggests that improvements in healthcare quality depend not only on the performance of healthcare professionals but also on investments in organizational capacity and physical resources.

Rathert et al. emphasized that patient satisfaction is influenced by a combination of interpersonal and organizational factors, with healthcare delivery conditions playing an important role in shaping patient experiences [11]. Similar conclusions were reported by Aliman and Mohamad, who highlighted the impact of organizational conditions, resource availability, and service environments on patients' perceptions of healthcare quality and satisfaction [14]. These findings may explain why infrastructure emerged as the weakest-rated component of healthcare quality in the present study.

Overall, the results indicate that respondents most positively evaluated those aspects of healthcare associated with respect for patient rights and active involvement in treatment. In contrast, organizational and infrastructural factors received less favorable evaluations. This pattern suggests that healthcare quality is determined not only by the competence and professionalism of healthcare workers but also by the conditions under which healthcare services are delivered.

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted in

a single healthcare institution and included a relatively small sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Second, the data were based on self-reported perceptions and may therefore be subject to response bias and subjective interpretation. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into hospitalized patients' perceptions of healthcare quality and highlights important factors influencing patient experiences during hospitalization.

Conclusion

The perception of hospital healthcare quality among respondents was primarily shaped by experiences related to communication with healthcare professionals, access to information, participation in decision-making, and respect for patients' rights during treatment. The most positively evaluated aspects of healthcare were informed consent, privacy protection, and respect for patients' preferences, indicating the presence of important elements of patient-centered care in everyday hospital practice.

At the same time, the findings demonstrate that patient satisfaction is not determined solely by medical procedures and professional competence. Organizational and infrastructural conditions of hospitalization emerged as the least favorably evaluated aspect of healthcare quality, highlighting the importance of environmental and organizational factors in shaping patients' overall experiences.

These results emphasize the need for continuous improvement of healthcare professionals' communication competencies, greater patient involvement in treatment-related decision-making, and the creation of conditions that support more accessible, responsive, and patient-centered healthcare. Particular attention should be directed toward improving organizational processes and hospital infrastructure, as these factors may substantially influence patients' perceptions of healthcare quality.

Future studies should include a larger number of healthcare institutions and participants to provide a more comprehensive understanding of patient experiences and to identify the factors that most strongly contribute to improving the quality of hospital healthcare.

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