

# PHYSICIAN - PATIENT RELATIONSHIP: A DETERMINING FACTOR IN PATIENTS' SATISFACTION

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**Abstract:** *The interpersonal aspects of medical care held the main weight in the patient's satisfaction. They refer to the communication process between the patient and the medical personnel. The patient's expectations reveal the following aspects which must be taken into consideration by the medical personnel of the County Emergency Hospital of Alba: scheduling a more extended time to anamnesis and consultation; awarding a more detailed attention to the manifold problems of the patients, by the physicians; the interest of the medical personnel towards the social and psychological issues of the patients; encouragement from the physicians; scheduling a more extended time for communication than that scheduled within the daily visit; the extension of the time required for the direct consultation. One of the priorities of the County Emergency Hospital of Alba is to identify the needs of the patients in order to allow the medical personnel to meet them and to use proper medical techniques and procedures within an adequate and efficient communication environment with the patients.*

**Keywords:** *interpersonal relations, proper and efficient communication*

**Rezumat:** *Aspectele interpersonale de îngrijiri medicale ocupă cea mai mare pondere în satisfacția pacienților. Ele se referă la procesul de comunicare dintre pacient și personalul medical. Așteptările pacienților relevă următoarele aspecte care ar trebui avute în vedere de către personalul medical al spitalului județean de Urgență Alba: alocarea unei perioade mai îndelungate de timp pentru anamneză și consultație; acordarea de către medici a unei mai mari atenții față de problemele complexe ale pacienților; interesul personalului medical pentru problemele sociale și psihologice ale pacienților; încurajare din partea medicilor; alocarea unei perioade de timp mai mare pentru comunicare, decât cea acordată la vizita zilnică; prelungirea timpului acordat consultației directe. Una dintre prioritățile Spitalului Județean Alba este identificarea nevoilor pacienților pentru ca personalul medical să vină în întâmpinarea acestora, utilizând adecvat tehnicile și procedurile medicale într-un climat de comunicare adecvată și eficientă cu pacienții.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *relații interpersonale, comunicare adecvată și eficientă*

## INTRODUCTION

One of the main aspects of the medical care is the extension and accuracy of the communication process between physicians and patients. The patient's satisfaction is closely related to the clarity of the information provided by the physician and this aspect is an important sign of the quality of the communication process between the physician and the patient. All patients appreciate the interpersonal communication skills of the medical personnel and only afterwards their technical skills, intelligence and qualification.

The main component of the satisfaction degree of the patients hospitalised in the departments of the County Emergency Hospital of Alba is determined by the interpersonal relationship they developed with the medical personnel and especially with the physician.

The technical part of the health care is in accordance to the way in which the medical knowledge is applied to individual cases, taking into account both the knowledge level of the healthcare service provider (physician/nurse) and the technology available to them within the hospital.

The assessment of the technical aspects by the patients is not accurate, as they do not possess the knowledge of the specialised personnel. The patients are aware of the way the medical services are provided to them, but it is very difficult for them to know if their expectations have been fulfilled in a satisfactory manner from the technical point of view.

The patients are not able to recognize whether the insufficient/undesired results were determined by an inadequate care or undesired circumstances. At the same time, the performance of certain manoeuvres, proceedings, interventions, therapies, which are correct from the technical point of view, but unnecessary, have been considered by the average patients as a quality of the medical services, the patients being satisfied with them.

On the other hand, there is another group of patients, better informed, who had previous experiences in higher medical units and who recognise a series of deficiencies within the medical care process and show their dissatisfaction towards the medical services they receive.

The research performed by DONABEDIAN shows that the patients' satisfaction is given by:

- 1) The communication skills of the medical personnel – 49%;
- 2) Technical skills - 24%;
- 3) Both types of skills influenced the patient's satisfaction - 27%.

The above-mentioned research also shows that the technical assessment of the medical care is difficult, limited and inadequate.

There is large evidence suggesting that the patients may provide information on some of the technical aspects regarding the medical care. Among them, we mention:

- if certain well-known investigations have been required, but they were not performed due to negligence;
- if certain proceedings/treatments have been prescribed and they have not been provided.

This is the case of the highly educated patients who know their disease. They do have a specific type of knowledge and a specific expectation regarding the hospital. The fulfilment or not fulfilment of the personal expectations determines the satisfaction /dissatisfaction of the patients.

The interpersonal aspects of the medical care hold the main weight in the patients' satisfaction. They refer to the communication process between the patient and the medical personnel. The communication should be complete and accurate.

The patient satisfaction is closely related to the clarity of the information provided by the physician regarding the illness and its therapy, to the patient's perception that the physician is sincerely interested in the needs of the receiver of the medical care services and is sensitive to many aspects raised by the patient. This kind of patients belongs to the active patient type who prefer to be actively involved in the decision making process.

Another category of patients prefer the physician to take over the whole task of diagnosis and treatment.

Regarding the satisfaction questionnaires applied to the patients of the County Emergency Hospital of Alba in the years 2006 and 2007, 926 patients were interviewed (423 patients in the year 2006 and 503 patients in the year 2007). The questionnaires contained an item regarding the perception of the interpersonal relationship with the physicians.

Regarding the question "What do you like most about your physician?" the investigated patients gave the following answers in the decreasing order of their preferences:

- 1) he/she tells me all what I want to know about my diseases 58.4%;
- 2) he/she shows a personal interest 46.3%;
- 3) he/she provides me a detailed investigation 42.3%;
- 4) he/she speaks my language 31.9%;
- 5) he/she calms me down 28.7%;
- 6) he/she spends a lot of time with me 18.6%.

The quality of the discussion between the

physician and the patient has not only an influence on the patient's soul but it also brings the therapeutic calm. The patients make rapidly the difference between a comprehensive and a formal medical care.

According to the analysis of this item, the satisfaction of the patients regarding the interpersonal relationship with the physician is considered average.

The patients' expectations from this point of view show the following aspects, which must be taken into consideration by the medical personnel of the County Emergency Hospital of Alba:

- scheduling a more extended time to anamnesis and consultation;
- awarding a more detailed attention to the manifold problems of the patients by the physicians;
- the interest of the medical personnel towards the social and psychological issues of the patients;
- encouragement from the physicians;
- scheduling a more extended time for communication than that scheduled within the daily visit;
- the extension of the time scheduled for the direct consultation(advice/recommendations/instructions/prescriptions).

Thus, the results obtained confirm that the patients' satisfaction depends directly on their perception on the communication with the medical personnel they get in touch with. For the patients, the quality has firstly a dimension given by the interpersonal relationship and only secondly, by the professional competence. Due to the fact that the patients are not a homogenous group, their way of judging the quality varies depending on their personal characteristics and the congruence degree between the services provided and those expected.

In conclusion, one of the priorities of the County Emergency Hospital of Alba is to identify the needs of the patients in order to allow the medical personnel to meet them and to use proper medical techniques and procedures within an adequate and efficient communication environment with the patients.

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