



PRIMER/BRIEF

Measuring Patient Experience

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Why Measure Patient Experience?

Patient centeredness is now widely accepted as a core dimension of health care quality. The use of surveys to query patients about their experience in the health care setting is the best and often only way to examine whether the experiences deemed essential for high-quality, patient-centered care actually take place. As with any dimension of quality, measurement of patient experience provides a basis of information required for any effort to improve the system. Improving patient experience not only addresses those aspects of care that often matter most to patients—such as timely access to care, good communication, respect, and courtesy—but also has the potential to affect a practice on a more comprehensive level. From a clinical perspective, studies have shown that good patient experience is associated with patients being more engaged in their care and willing to follow their providers' instructions, as well as with improved patient outcomes. Good patient experience also has also been associated with positive business outcomes, such as lower malpractice risk and greater patient loyalty.

For a more in-depth look at the case for measuring patient experience, see [*Good for Health, Good for Business: The Case for Measuring Patient Experience of Care*](#).

How Is Patient Experience Measured?

While various administrative and clinical practice data can be used to measure performance on most quality aims, patient centeredness is unique in that patients themselves typically are the best source of information to assess patient-centered aspects of care. Patients can serve as a source of information in several ways, including: (1) as respondents to patient surveys; (2) as informants through focus groups and interviews; (3) as trained "mystery shoppers" to report on their observations and experiences in the shoes of a patient; and (4) by volunteering their comments and opinions through the growing number of websites that invite patients to submit their comments online.

About Aligning Forces for Quality

Aligning Forces for Quality (AF4Q) is the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's signature effort to lift the overall quality of health care in targeted communities, as well as reduce racial and ethnic disparities and provide real models for national reform. The Foundation's commitment to improve health care in 16 AF4Q communities is the largest effort of its kind ever undertaken by a U.S. philanthropy. AF4Q asks the people who get care, give care and pay for care to work together to improve the quality and value of care delivered locally. The Center for Health Care Quality in the Department of Health Policy at George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services serves as the national program office. Learn more about AF4Q at www.forces4quality.org. Learn more about RWJF's efforts to improve quality and equality of care at www.rwjf.org/qualityequality/af4q/.

About the Author

The Shaller Consulting Group provides technical assistance to *Aligning Forces for Quality* by helping regional Alliances support patient experience measurement and improvement.

What Are the Advantages to Using Patient Surveys?

Patient surveys provide a systematic method of assessing patient experience through a representative sample of patients for a given doctor, hospital, or other health care provider. Properly conducted using scientifically developed and validated questionnaires, patient surveys can yield reliable information for comparing large numbers of providers on common metrics that are important to patients. Using randomized, probabilistic sampling methods, it is possible to obtain highly reliable estimates of provider performance by surveying relatively small numbers of patients. It is the ability to randomly select and control the sample of patients that makes patient surveys a more valid measure of performance than patient comments submitted without the benefits of sample control. Such comments can be useful, but they do not provide a representative assessment of provider performance that can be reliably compared.

What Is the Difference Between Measuring Patient Experience and Patient Satisfaction?

Many patient surveys are based on respondent satisfaction ratings of their providers and other aspects of care. Surveys that use rating scales (for example, from excellent to poor) tend to reflect respondent expectations and do not suggest what can be done to improve the ratings. In contrast, surveys designed to measure the patient experience go beyond simple ratings of care to focus on the critical and supportive interactions patients would ideally experience during their health care encounters. Such surveys ask patients to report whether or not they had positive experiences in areas that research has shown are important to patients, including ease of scheduling appointments, availability of information, communication with doctors, responsiveness of clinic staff, and coordination with other care providers. Because they ask patients whether or not certain events or behaviors important to them actually occurred, or how often, patient experience surveys also can be useful in highlighting actionable areas that providers can focus on for improvement.

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