



## QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE DENTAL HEALTH SERVICES PROVIDED AT A DENTAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION IN BANGALORE, KARNATAKA- A FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

### Dental Science

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### ABSTRACT

**Aim:** To explore and understand the quality of dental care and services provided to the patients visiting a dental educational institution through focus group discussion.

**Methods:** Focus group discussion was conducted with 19 participants [4 patients, 7 teaching faculty of dental institution, 5 dental students (PG's/ Interns), 2 dental auxiliaries and a representative from NGO]. Thematic content analysis was performed and main themes and sub-themes were extracted from the recordings.

**Results:** Seven themes were extracted from the contents of focus group discussion: (i) Attitude of patients towards dental treatment and the attitude of dentist towards patients (ii) Cost of dental treatment in the dental institution (iii) Convenience to the patients which included working hours of the institution, treatment duration, location and visibility of the dental institution (iv) Barriers in providing treatment which included inter departmental differences in diagnosis, problems with power outages, generator and compressor problems (vi) Shortage of auxiliary staff (vii) Non availability of specific department related feedback forms and feedback from the patients was not mandatory.

**Conclusion:** Majority of the participants were satisfied with the facilities, services and treatment received at the dental educational institution

### KEYWORDS

dental care, focus group discussion, qualitative study, satisfaction

### INTRODUCTION

Oral health of the patient has an important effect on patient satisfaction. Patient satisfaction is crucial in the evaluation of the overall quality of care, and thus enhancing the quality of the services provided in a dental educational institution can enhance the satisfaction level of patients and consequently increase the level of their oral health. Patient satisfaction is an important factor that influences both the treatment mode and the relationship with the dentist.<sup>1</sup>

Qualitative studies can explore the complexity of the issue and give meaning to the social phenomena related to the values of dental services and experiences in health care. It provides insights into the problem and helps to develop ideas or hypothesis for potential quantitative research. It focuses on the "why" rather than the "what" of social phenomena and relies on the direct experiences of human beings as meaning-making agents in their everyday lives.<sup>2</sup>

Focus group discussion is a form of qualitative research method in which the interviewer (also called the moderator) asks research participants specific questions about a topic or an issue in a group discussion. The objective of the focus group discussion is to give the researcher an understanding of the participant's perspective on the topic of discussion.

Focus group discussions are frequently used to obtain knowledge, perspectives and attitudes of people about issues, and seek explanations for behaviors in a way that would be less easily accessible in responses to direct questions, as in one-to-one interviews. Hence, there is a need to conduct a focus group discussion among the dental population and the patients to explore the items that represent satisfaction in the specific field of dental services.<sup>3</sup>

There are only few studies which have used focus group discussion to investigate and evaluate the quality of dental care, services provided to patients. Hence this study was designed to investigate and evaluate the quality of dental care and services provided to patients visiting a dental educational institution, Bangalore, Karnataka.

Research question: What is the quality of the health services provided to the patients visiting a dental educational institution?

### MATERIALS AND METHOD

Focus group discussion was organized and conducted in a dental educational institution, Bangalore, Karnataka during September 2018. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Ethical committee. Informed consent was obtained from all the study participants before the study.

Using a convenient sampling technique, a total of 19 study subjects participated in the study. The focus group discussion consisted of five groups representing patients- 4, teaching faculty of dental institution- 7, dental students- 5, dental auxiliaries- 2 and a representative from NGO- 1. Subjects willing to give informed written consent and subjects who have undergone/ undergoing any form of dental treatment in the dental institution were included in the study.

The eligible patients were contacted and invited to participate in the focus group discussion using the telephone numbers obtained from the patients' folders. Detailed information including the purpose, procedure, and significance of conducting this study were explained to the patients through telephonic discussions.

The venue selected for conducting the focus group discussion was made geographically convenient for the participants. The discussion room was free from outside distractions. The participants were divided into five different groups and were arranged to sit around a table to enable them to see and hear one another. (Figure 1)

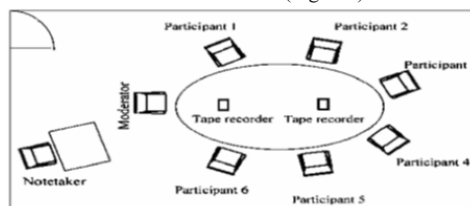


Fig. 1 Sketch of a focus group seating plan.

## DATA COLLECTION

- The focus group discussion was conducted bilingually (Kannada and English) and it lasted about two hours. The moderator facilitated the discussion and encouraged the participants to express their opinions and views freely and the note taker noted down the phrases or statements made by each participant. To encourage in depth exploration of a particular issue, the moderator utilized a set of core questions. There were 32 core questions out of which five of them were peripheral questions. The following are some of the examples of the core questions used for the study:

- To the participants:
  - When do you visit a dentist?
  - How frequently you visit a dentist?
- To the faculty members, PG's and UG's:
  - After the completion of the treatment do you assess patient satisfaction?

The discussions were video, and audio taped and later transcribed for analysis. Data saturation was achieved when no more new themes or key words emerged from the focus group discussion.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The audio and video recording from the focus group discussions were transcribed for analysis. Thematic content analysis was performed. The main themes and sub-themes were extracted from the recordings.

## RESULTS

Various opinions on dental satisfaction arose from the focus group discussion. They were organized by key emergent themes on dental satisfaction derived from patient's consideration when they assessed dental services. Themes extracted from the content of the focus group discussions on dental satisfaction were:<sup>4,7,8</sup>

- Attitude of patient as well as dentist
- Cost
- Convenience
- Barriers in providing treatment
- Shortage of manpower
- Feedback forms

### • Attitude

This included attitude of the patient as well as the dentists. The key considerations were the attitude of the patients towards the dental checkup and the amount of information that the dentist provided to the patients before starting the treatment.

*"I feel like visiting a dentist only when I get tooth ache."*

(Participant 1, 2, 3 group 1)

*"The doctor explained clearly to me about the treatment purpose, procedure and cost when I asked for more information"*

(Participant 1, 2 group 1)

### • Cost

Cost was mentioned by almost all participants in the consideration of the satisfaction level towards the dental care provided by this hospital. They agreed that the price of the dental care services provided by this hospital was much lower compared with private clinics.

*"I feel that the price is much cheaper in dental colleges than in private clinics."*

(Participant 1, 2 group 1)

### • Convenience

This included the accessibility (eg: opening hours, location of the hospital, awareness about dental college) and the duration of treatment procedure.

*"The hospital is closed on Saturday and Sunday, which makes a lot of patients to take leave from work in order to visit the dentist."*

(Participant 20, group 5)

The time spent on solving the dental problems in the hospital had also become one of the reasons affecting patients' satisfaction level, which included duration of the entire treatment process (treatment duration).

*"I think the treatment duration should be shortened so that I do not need to visit the dentist for so many times."* (Participant 3, group 1)

The access to the hospital was one of the reasons affecting patient's satisfaction.

*"I felt like going elsewhere for the treatment because of the rude behavior of security persons for parking."*

(Participant 3, group 1)

### • Barriers in providing treatment

When the participants were probed regarding the barriers in providing treatment, the participants mentioned equipment and facilities and perceived skill of the dentists are some of the factors influencing the satisfaction level of the patient.

Some participants expressed that because of differences in diagnosis in different departments, the treatments provided to the patients got delayed.

Some participants expressed caution or fear that undergraduate and post graduate students would treat them and were in doubt regarding the skill of students whereas some participants expressed more confidence.

### • Manpower

Some participants said that insufficient auxiliary staff was another aspect affecting the quality of dental care as some participants mentioned. Due to lack of manpower students themselves have to do everything and it is time consuming for both the dentists and the patients.

*"I saw the student had no attenders to help him, and he was busy doing all the things by himself"* (Participant 13, 5 group 2,3)

### • Feedback forms

Feedback forms were another aspect mentioned by the participants when they talked about the satisfaction. Participants expressed that there were no separate feedback forms for each department, and it was not kept mandatory for the patients to fill the feedback forms.

Most of the participants in this study responded that the cost of the dental treatment was less compared to the private clinics. Regarding the accessibility of the dental care most of the participants feel that the dental educational institution is located in an urban area near the main road, hence it is very accessible to the patients. Most of the respondents stated that the attitude of the doctors was approachable, amiable and empathetic. Regarding the quality of the treatment most of the patients who participated in this study were satisfied with the quality of the treatment.

## DISCUSSION

Qualitative research is unique in its character of eliciting data for a given research question. It elicits and captures data which cannot be captured by quantitative study. Focus group discussion is a type of qualitative research which can capture such a data that cannot be elicited and interpreted by quantitative study.

This qualitative study can be used to understand the level of satisfaction in regards to the nature of dental consideration among patients their fulfillment and disappointment with nature of dental care. In the present study, the main causes for patient satisfactions were: cost of dental treatment, accessibility of dental care, attitude of the doctors towards patients, good quality of treatment.

The pattern is similar to the findings of the study led by **Luo et al. in China**<sup>4</sup> where the main causes for patient satisfaction were: the attitude of the doctors, the cost of dental treatment and the accessibility of the dental hospital. In the present study, the main causes for patient dissatisfaction included: the lack of chairside assistant who can assist the dentist and the lack of cleanliness due to the shortage of manpower. When we compared it with study done by **Nagesh Bhat et al.**<sup>1</sup> showed that long waiting time for the treatment seemed to be the main reason for patient dissatisfaction. The study done by **Nagappan et al.**<sup>5</sup> showed that the patients felt that they had a problem in scheduling appointments.

In this study, the main causes for dissatisfaction among academic staff, dental auxiliaries and students were: barriers in providing treatment included inter departmental differences in diagnosis, problems with power outages, generator and compressor problem, shortage of

auxiliary staff, non-availability of Feedback forms. This is supported by the study done by **Maryam et al**<sup>6</sup>, the main causes for dissatisfaction among the academic staff, nurses, and students were: keeping patients waiting, inadequate dental academic staff and nurses, especially in the prosthodontics department, inadequately trained students and incomplete treatments, inadequate materials.

This study was found to have certain limitations such as: susceptibility to bias, because individual opinions were influenced by dominant participants, patients from different departments were not involved so that more diverse opinions could have been obtained and most of the participants who participated in the study were from Department of Prosthodontics and Oral Medicine and Radiology. the sample size was perhaps small and only one discussion session was held if we were to hold multiple focus group discussion the result would have been more comprehensive. Future studies may be needed to compare patients' satisfaction in the Dental Educational Institution with other dental care providers.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicated that majority of the participants were satisfied with the facilities, services and treatment received at the dental educational institution. In order to overcome participants dissatisfaction few recommendations are suggested: there is an immediate need to recruit a greater number of dental auxiliaries, attention should be given to maintain cleanliness and to check the power outages which can always interfere the productivity of the dental educational institution.

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## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest.

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