

Patients' Knowledge of their Rights and its Impact on Hospital Admissions at the St. John of God Hospital, Duayaw-Nkwanta, Brong Ahafo Region, Ghana

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Abstract

The patients' rights are being considered as one of the important factors in patient satisfaction vis-à-vis their demands and observing their rights and providing care along with respect (Gyapong, 2007). Patient rights in the health care service preserves patient dignity as a rank of a human, and is considered very crucial especially when patient's susceptibility easily exposes him to the violations and weaknesses of the health care system. The purpose of the study was to investigate patients' knowledge of their rights and how it impacts on hospital admissions at the St. John of God hospital, Duayaw-Nkwanta, Ghana. It was a descriptive cross sectional study and the purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit 100 participants for the study. Questionnaire was used as the data collection tool, while SPSS (version 20) was used as the statistical tool for analysis. The study revealed that majority (72.8%) of the patients have a good level of knowledge and awareness about the patients' rights, and they look up to health professionals to observe those rights provisions. It was revealed that maximum awareness was about the right to informed consent where 93.9% of the patients knew and agreed that consents are to be obtained from patients before medical or surgical procedures are performed on them. Those who disagreed represented 5.1% and those who didn't know what that right says represented only 1%. The study found out that provision of more information by health care providers may enhance patients' decision making and exercise of their rights. The study recommends health facilities and the stakeholders of the healthcare system to increase patients' awareness of their rights and to better equip and resource health facilities to enhance the provision of services that meet patients' expectations.

Keywords: *Patient rights, Patient satisfaction, Informed consent, Hospital admissions, Knowledge of rights*

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Background to the Study

Healthcare is an indispensable thing in the life of any group of people, but unfortunately sick people do not always get the kind of care they are supposed to receive from healthcare providers.

Tadd, Hillman, Calnan, Bayer, and Read (2002) assert that patient's knowledge of their rights is central to the interactions between Health Care Professionals and patients but that staff often fail to appreciate the impact of patients and/or relatives experiencing or witnessing undignified care. Patients in varied hospital settings have identified that dignity was important to them (Jacelon, 2003). Patients' active participation in their own care is known to increase motivation and adherence to prescriptions, give better treatment results, and create greater satisfaction with received care (Williams, Freedman and Deci, 1998), and reduce stress and anxiety (Lauri, 1998). Patients' participation is an important basis for nursing care and medical treatment and it is also a legal right in many Western countries. Promoting patient rights is among the priorities of healthcare providers and is considered as an indicator of health state in every community (Joolae, Nikbakht-Nasrabadi and Parsa-Yekta, 2007).

Providing quality and accessible healthcare services has become the principal aim of most countries in the world, especially of developing countries like Ghana, as a matter of this study. The need for reliable and evidence-based care is a development in discussions at local and national platforms. The implication of this assertion is that the government of Ghana has become more aware of and more dedicated to the provision of effective and reliable healthcare for its people (Hunt, 2007).

As a result of this, healthcare consumers have become more aware and mindful of their health rights and for that matter, demand a safe and quality healthcare system. The government of Ghana in its quest of providing quality healthcare services, has through the Ghana Health Service developed and adopted the Patients' Charter that seeks to protect the rights of patients accessing health care. It highlights the patients' rights and responsibilities in the care process irrespective of sex, ethnic background and religion. In this health rights provision, health facilities must provide for, and respect the rights and responsibilities of patients, families, health workers and other healthcare providers (WHO, 2002).

Contemporary issues related to the quality of health care services, attention to the patients as customers and accomplishing their satisfaction has been the main priorities and are of high importance today. The patients' rights are being considered as one of the important factors in patient satisfaction vis-à-vis their demands and observing their rights and providing care along with respect (Gyapong, 2007). An important tenet of nursing is respecting the human rights and dignity of all patients. Hamidian (2007) has indicated that the priority of healthcare organizations must be the protection of patients' rights. Increased awareness on patients' rights promotes responsible behaviours within health systems, provides greater potential for improving health and favours a better use of health care.

Awareness of the patients' rights and observing them accomplishes more satisfaction of the patient, and leads to the spread of good morals among patients and the medical team. If there is no trust between health care professionals and patients, it would lead to damages and losses for the patient and the medical team. Also, it would lead to terrible and unpleasant occurrences which are difficult to compensate and would be followed by legal prosecutions. Sick persons seek to patronize institutions that respect their rights and this culminates in increasing their Outpatient Department (OPD) attendance and possible admission rates.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are classified into general and specific. The general objective of the study is to assess the level of patients' knowledge of their rights and its impacts on hospital admissions at the St. John of God Hospital in Duayaw-Nkwanta in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. To ascertain the level of awareness of patients regarding the patients' rights charter among Patients and Health Staff of the St. John of God Hospital.
2. To discover the experiences of patients on rights being exercised to them by the healthcare workers in accordance to the Patients' Charter at the St. John of God Hospital.
3. To determine the factors that affect the implementation of the Patients' Rights Charter at the St. John of God Hospital.

Significance of the Study

1. The study revealed the level of knowledge of patients about their rights and how it empowers them to demand a standard care from healthcare providers at the institutional level.
2. The study provided insight on how health staff comply with the provisions in the patients right charter to provide care to meet the patients expectations.
3. The outcome of the study will be a source of information to management of public hospitals as well as policy makers on the implementation of the patients' right charter and it sought to uncover any factors that may be militating against the implementation of the patient right charter at the institutional level.
4. Again, the information in the study will help staff of the St. John of God hospital to provide care with reference to the patients' rights charter to meet the patients' expectation in a manner that will help them to patronize the hospital to possibly increase their admission rates. A critical factor necessary for the revenue mobilization capacity of the hospital.

Literature Review

Providing quality and accessible healthcare services has become the principal aim of most countries in the world, especially of developing countries like Ghana. The need for reliable and evidence-based care is a development in discussions at local and national platforms. The implication of this assertion is that the government of Ghana has become more aware of and

more dedicated to the provision of effective and reliable healthcare for its people (Hunt, 2007). As a result of this, healthcare consumers have become more aware and mindful of their health rights and for that matter, demand a safe and quality healthcare system. Patient rights have recently become the centre of national attention in the healthcare practice and Ghanaians are becoming more aware of their rights. Despite this awareness, there appears to be a gap between their knowledge and ability to exercise their rights.

Patient rights may be considered as one of the main basis for defining the standards of clinical services. The government in its quest of meeting this need, has provided a comprehensive Patient Charter developed through the Ghana Health Service. This highlights the patients' rights and responsibilities in the care process irrespective of sex, ethnic background and religion. In this health rights provision, health facilities must provide for and respect the rights and responsibilities of patients, families, health workers and other healthcare providers (WHO, 2002).

Patients have rights with regards to healthcare, but do they always know what their rights are as provided in the Patients' Charter? One can only make demands if one knows what his/her rights are. It must be noted that, increased awareness on patients' rights promotes responsible behaviours within health systems, provides greater potential for improving health and favours a better use of health care.

It must again be noted in recent times that, education, increase in technology, availability of information on the internet, and governments' commitments to the provision of quality care to their people has created some level of awareness of patients of their rights and has empowered them to demand a standard quality care from healthcare providers. Presently, most hospitals and health providers in Ghana are being sued for negligence of duty and malpractices because of increased awareness of patients of their rights and their demand for those rights to be respected as legislative provisions. Awareness of patients' rights and observing them is a key element in enhancing patients' satisfaction of services and thus leads to high patronage of hospital facilities.

In an era of increasing competition between the private and the public sector, healthcare delivery has become very competitive, and in this era of increasing competition among the public and the private hospitals in Ghana, hospitals that want to perform better are required to improve on their service delivery packages, in order to enjoy competitive advantages. Awareness of patients' rights and observing them is thus necessary in enhancing their (patients') satisfaction of services, and the extent to which patients' rights are respected in institutions shall determine their level of patronage of such institutions.

Patients now have access to good quality healthcare, which comes with the readiness and ability to pay for medical care. The main beneficiaries of a good healthcare system are clearly the patients, making them the focus of the healthcare delivery system. Health, which is mainly the relief or cure of ill health, is universally vital and this results in the imperative to provide high-quality services in response to developments in medicine and the desire of the caring professions to aspire to clinical excellence (Sewell, 1997).

Health care provision in Ghana has become competitive with current level of patients' awareness about their rights irrespective of sex, gender, ethnic background, level of education and status in the society. The current high cost of health care definitely demands a more effective and safe health care process. The proliferation of private hospitals and health centres, traditional healing centres in the wake of high hospital attendance calls for an improvement in the public health services with regards to equal healthcare opportunities upon admission. This research seeks to investigate intensely into patients' knowledge of their rights and how it impacts on hospital admissions using the St. John of God Hospital in the Tano North Municipality of the Brong-Ahafo Region of Ghana as a case study. It is the researcher's anticipation that the findings of this study will serve as a source of information to guide future studies and to all stakeholders including policy makers and practitioners.

Methodology

Study Population

Patients (inpatients and outpatients) of the St. John of God hospital in Duayaw-Nkwanta in the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana

Study Design

Descriptive Cross Sectional Study

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The Purposive Sampling technique was employed to recruit 100 participants for the study.

Source of Data

Primary data was the main source of data for study. Primary data was collected from the respondents via the use of a questionnaire.

Data Collection Instrument

The instrument for the data collection was a questionnaire. This was made up of both structured and unstructured questionnaires, made up of both close and open ended questions divided into four (4) sections.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

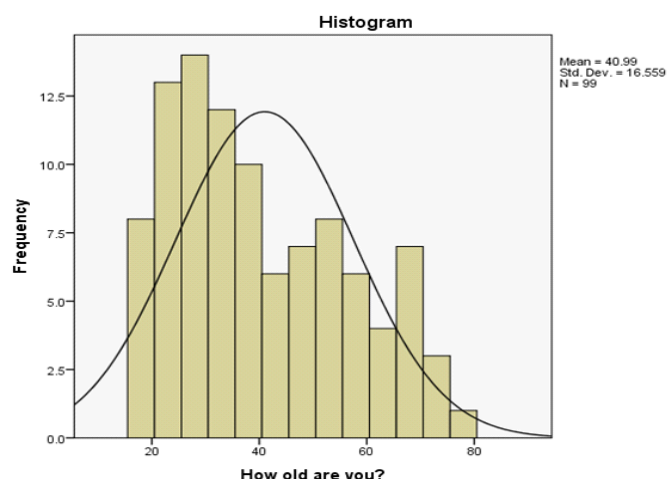
The inclusion criteria for subjects' recruitment into the study was fully conscious and alert, 18 and above years old, able to give consent. Both inpatients and outpatients were considered for the study. The exclusion criteria was patient's physical or mental inabilities to respond to the questionnaire or those who are not fully conscious and alert, and those below 18 years of age.

Ethical Considerations

Approval was obtained from the management of the hospital, consent sought from study participants, and confidentiality of data assured and maintained.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents



Gender		Educational Background		Occupation		Marital Status	
Male	33%	None	17%	Farming	37%	Married	58%
Female	67%	Primary	11%	Business/Trading	21%	Widow/Widower	9%
		JHS/Middle	36%	Government	11%	Divorced	6%
		School		employee		Single	27%
		SHS/Secondary	18%	Unemployed	17%		
		School					
		Tertiary	18%	Others	14%		
Total Number of Respondents				100			

Knowledge and Awareness about the Patients' Rights

Questions were posed to the respondents to test their knowledge about the patients' rights. Among those questions included; the patient has to be prevented from access to information about his/her health status; the health professional decides the care for the patient and the patient is not allowed to play active part in his care; the patient has the right to make free decisions concerning his health, and he has the right to privacy, confidentiality and socio-medical data; consents are to be obtained from patients before medical or surgical procedures are performed on them.

The answers obtained from respondents revealed that majority of the respondents (72.8%) have a good level of knowledge about the patients' rights, and they look up to health professionals to observe those rights when they visit the hospitals or when they are receiving care from health professionals. Knowledge about the patients' rights is key in determining how health professionals comply with those rights.

On knowledge about the patient has the right to make free decisions concerning his health, and he has the right to privacy, confidentiality and socio-medical data, majority of the respondents (91) representing 91.9% agreed to the question, only 2(2%) disagreed, and those

who didn't know what the right answer is, constituted 6 (6.1%) of the total respondents. On knowledge about the right to informed consent, majority of the patients had a good knowledge about the right to informed consent. 93 respondents representing 93.9% of the total respondents agreed that consents are to be obtained from patients before medical or surgical procedures are performed on them. Those who disagreed represented 5.1%, and those who didn't know what the right says represented only 1%.

This findings is consistent with a study conducted by Masood, Rahman, Mahmood, Nisar and Mohsin (2015), who conducted a study at the tertiary care hospital of Rawalpindi, Pakistan on awareness among hospitalized patients of their rights. Among 140 respondents, they found out that maximum awareness was about the right to informed consent (77.1%), followed by the right of being treated with respect (37.9%).

Findings Implications of Knowledge and Awareness of Rights on Healthcare

Literature has shown that increased awareness on patients' rights promotes responsible behaviours within health systems, provides greater potential for improving health and favours a better use of health care.

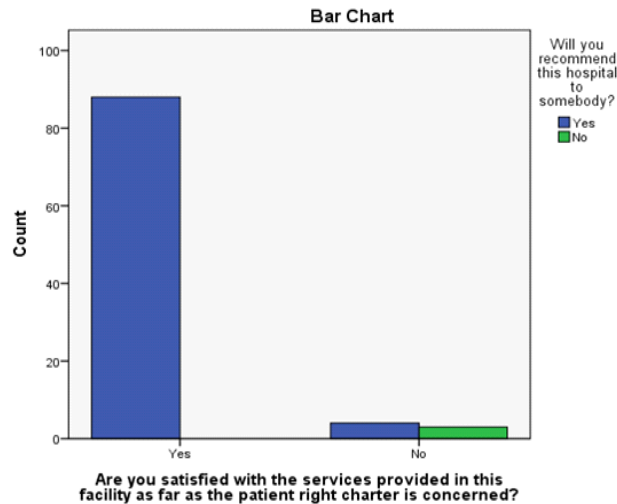
Patients' active participation in their own care is known to increase motivation and adherence to prescriptions, give better treatment results, create greater satisfaction with received care (Williams, Freedman, and Deci, 1998), and reduce stress and anxiety (Lauri, 1998). Knowledge and awareness about the patients' right is a necessary factor in ensuring health professionals' compliance to those rights provisions, and the net effect is enhancing patients' satisfaction of services.

Patients' Experiences with their Rights Being Exercised to them by the Healthcare Workers in Accordance with the Patients' Charter

The researcher wanted to find out about the experiences of patients with regards to how their rights are exercised to them by the health professionals. With this, a question was posed to the respondents to describe nurses' human relation in terms of privacy, courtesy, respect accorded them and their listening skills during interactions with them.

Findings from the respondents showed that, a significant proportion of the respondents found nurses human relation in terms of privacy, courtesy, respect accorded patients and their listening skills interactions with patients to be very satisfactory (56%). This was supported by 39% who also found it to be satisfactory. Those who found it to be dissatisfactory stood at 5% of the total respondents.

Respondents were also asked whether or not they are satisfied with the services provided in the facility as far as the patient right charter is concerned? 88 respondents representing 92.6% said they are satisfied, while 7 respondents representing 7.4% of the total respondents said they are not satisfied. The responses are displayed in the figure below.



95.7% of patients who were satisfied with the services indicated that they will recommend the hospital to someone else. This finding shows a significant moderate positive correlation with a correlation co-efficient of 0.64 ($X^2 = 38.9$, $df = 1$, $P = 0.000$)

Are you Exercising your Right as a Patient?

46 of the respondents representing 86.8% of those that were exercising their rights as patients think that there are factors that may be militating against the implementation of the patients' rights.

31 respondents representing 88.6% of those that say they are exercising their rights also think that there are no factors that militate against the implementation of the patients' rights. This shows a weak negative correlation which is not statistically significant with a correlation co-efficient of -0.026 ($X^2 = 0.61$, $df = 1$, $P = 0.805$).

Conclusions

1. Most patients have good knowledge of their rights, but they are not fully exercising these rights. Patients should be encouraged to participate in the decision making process on their health issues because it is a channel towards achieving positive patient outcomes.
2. Adequate information about care including the risks of procedures, cost implications of care and possible outcomes of care among others should be provided. Provision of more information by health care providers may enhance patients' decision making and exercise of their rights.
3. Patients are getting more enlightened about their rights and health professionals should be in the position to work to observe those rights so as to avoid any elements of legal suits against health professionals who infringe on the rights of patients.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended from the study that, health professionals or institutions should provide adequate information on the patients' rights charter to help patients in the exercise of their rights to help promote patients health outcomes.

2. Adequate resources, both human and capital should be provided to help health professionals to deliver services that are in line with the patients' rights.

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