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Short Communication

Addressing Patient Concerns at the University of Michigan Dental School

Sneha Shah[1], Romesh Nalliah[2*], Nikita Rungta[1], Shahad Luaibi[1]

[1]University of Michigan, USA

[2]Associate Dean for Patient Services and Clinical Professor of Dentistry, School of Dentistry, University of Michigan, USA

***Correspondence author:** Romesh Nalliah, DDS, MHCM, Associate Dean for Patient Services and Clinical Professor of Dentistry, School of Dentistry, University of Michigan, USA; E-mail: romeshn@umich.edu

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Abstract

Effective communication between patients and dental providers is crucial for successful dental appointments, fostering trust and comfort. However, patients often carry unspoken concerns into dental clinics that significantly influence their experiences. The dental profession needs a standardized approach to record and address these concerns, leading to inconsistencies in how patient feedback is collected and acted upon. This can result in unresolved issues and patient dissatisfaction. Recognizing this problem, the University of Michigan School of Dentistry thought to improve how patient concerns are documented and addressed.

Keywords: Patient Concerns; Clinics; Patients; Dental Providers

Introduction

Solution

To record and manage patient concerns, the University of Michigan School of Dentistry adopted the "Patient Concern Form." It documents patient concerns, such as the treatment clinic and provider's name. The categories in the form are -: Attitude/Behavior, Facilities, Scheduling delays, Communication, Billing Issues, Policies, Quality of Care, Infection Control, Risk Management and Others. It also captures qualitative data in the form of patient comments and lists desired outcomes alphabetically to reflect patients' expectations for resolution. The result shows concerns from predoctoral and dental hygiene clinics, graduate program clinics and faculty clinics. This ensures that patient concerns are recorded and addressed, improving the overall patient experience.

Results

From January 12, 2007, to December 31, 2020, 380 patients lodged concerns:

- 200 patients in predoctoral clinics
- 100 patients in faculty clinics
- 180 patients in graduate clinics

Overall, the most frequently cited concern is poor communication, with 91 concerns in predoctoral clinics and 102 in other clinics. In predoctoral clinics, quality of care was the primary concern (137 concerns), followed by communication (85) and billing issues (91). The most common desired outcome was "facilitated communication" (171 out of 380 patients) (Fig. 1).

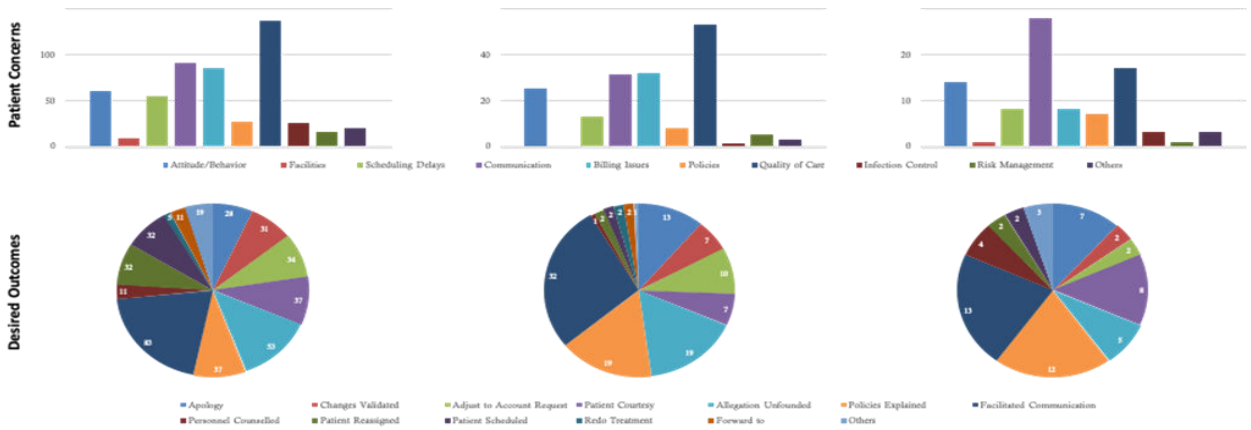

Figure 1: Statistics of the patient concerns and desired outcomes.

Discussion

"Communication", "Quality of care" and "billing issues" emerged as the predominant complaint, often stemming from communication issues. Based on these findings, the School of Dentistry enhanced its Quality Assurance program and hired a quality analyst. Additionally, the school move to a Faculty Coach model where groups of 20 D4 and D3 students were partnered with a full-time faculty member who could support and mentor them through the care progress of their patients' treatment. The school also created a Patient Family Advisory Board which enabled us to gain qualitative feedback from patients - historic survey were quantitative in nature and the feedback was mostly excellent. The school also completely re-structured many elements of the revenue cycle and moved those staff into the Office of Patient Services. In this structure, even fulfillment of the revenue cycle became a patient-centered endeavor.

Conclusion

The study identified patterns in patient concerns at an Academic Dental Center, with quality of care, communication and billing as key issues. Facilitated communication was the most common desired outcome and we began to offer this earlier in the conflict resolution process. Recognizing the reasons behind patient concerns allows dental professionals to improve patient experiences.

Conflict of Interests

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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