

Research Paper: Frequency of Patient Complaints Before and After Legal Medicine Consultation in Orthopedic Ward



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ABSTRACT

Background: Patient who complain of the health community are unpleasant and may endanger the honor of the medical community. However, patients' complaints can improve the quality of medical services, increase the accuracy of the medical staff, and reduce diagnostic and treatment costs. The aim of this study was to investigate the prevalence of patients' complaints before and after legal medicine consultation in the orthopedic ward of Taleghani hospital in Tehran, Iran.

Methods: This retrospective cross-sectional study investigated the frequency of the complaints of 460 patients before and after legal medicine consultation from spring 2011 to winter 2017. Data were analyzed by excel.

Results: The results of this study showed that the frequency of complaints was lowest in spring and highest in fall. The number of complaints and frequencies also decreased over time compared with the previous year. The lowest number of complaints was in 2011 and the highest in 2013.

Conclusion: In this study, performing legal medicine consultation in Taleghani hospital in Tehran, Iran reduced the number of registered complaints.

1. Introduction

Medical complaints are the dissatisfaction of the patient and their family and relatives, which need a response [1-3]. Due to the availability of modern information systems and the increasing level of education and public education, patients and

their families participate in healthcare and treatment of their diseases. Moreover, complaints about the quality of health care have increased dramatically [4, 5]. Consequently, minor complaints are considered essential to the quality of care to improve the standards of care [6-8].

Handling complaints is also very useful. Patients' complaints are an important and valuable source of improve-

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ment in performance and quality of hospital care [9] because patients are more sensitive to interventions [10, 11]. In most hospitals, the most common cause of the complaint is interpersonal problems. According to some studies, more than one-third of all complaints are related to communication difficulties, and in some studies, services are the main cause of patients' complaints [12-15]. International reports on the abundance of complaints of medical practitioners in various countries show that there has been an increase in complaints despite significant scientific advances and new technology in the medical field [16].

Relevant studies show an increased incidence of complaints about the quality of health care provided to patients. Complaints can also push the quality of care through legal medicine [17, 18]. On the other hand, the complaint can provide performance feedback on physicians' work, identify weaknesses and poor performance, and provide opportunities to design strategies to improve the quality of care [19]. Complaints can also indicate in which sections of the hospital, the process of providing services to their clients is problematic; thus, hospital managers and staff can analyze and resolve these problems with further investigations [20].

Generally, reviewing the rate and causes of complaints from medical staff and their resolution is a step towards increasing patient satisfaction and increasing hospital efficiency. Also, limited studies are available on patients' complaints in Iran, thus, recording and handling complaints have been considered as one of the important domains of clinical service governance in hospitals affiliated to medical universities. Therefore, the aim of this study was to investigate the prevalence of patients' complaints before and after legal medicine consultation in the orthopedic ward of Taleghani Hospital in Tehran, Iran.

2. Materials and Methods

The present study was a retrospective descriptive cross-sectional study performed on patients undergoing orthopedic surgery in the orthopedic ward of Taleghani hospital, Tehran, Iran from March 2011 to December 2017. In this study, all the complaints registered in Taleghani Hospital in Tehran were studied before and after medical consultation to resolve their problems as soon as possible. The experts of the Department of Inspection and Supervision from the Treatment Affairs of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences developed the data collection tool. In this study, the demographic questionnaire and a questionnaire regarding the registration and type of complaints were completed from patients. All com-

plaints (written, oral, and via telephone) registered at the Taleghani Hospital complaints office were reviewed.

Data were analyzed by Excel software using descriptive statistics, tables, and graphs. The research council and ethics committee of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences approved this study (IR.SBMU.RE-TECH.REC.1399.297).

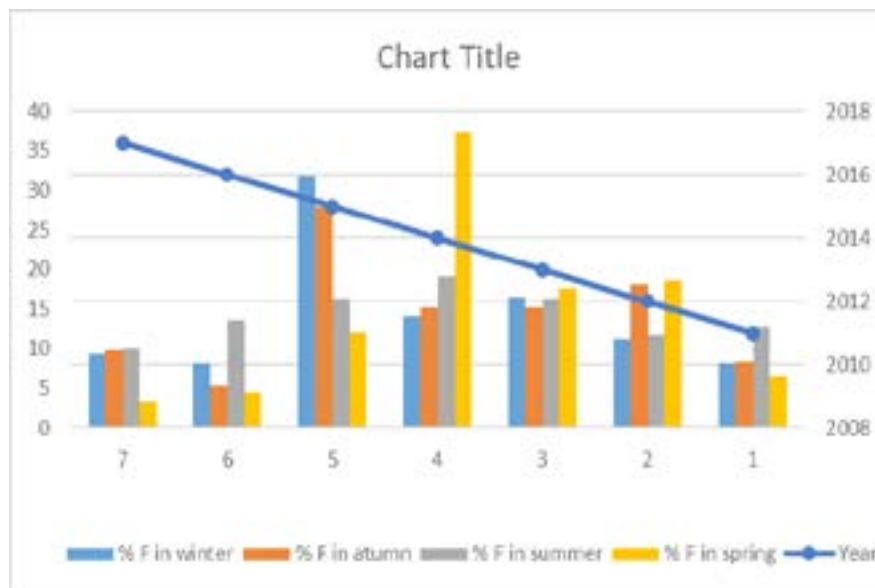
3. Results

The total number of complaints before legal medicine consultation filed by the Medical Council and the Legal Medicine Organization of Tehran was 810 (567 males and 243 females), was reduced to 460 were after consultation from March 2011 to December 2017. The mean age of these patients was 44 years old. All complaints filed after legal medicine consultation from spring 2011 to winter 2017 are listed in Figure 1 and Table 1. As can be seen in the table and diagram, in 2011, the highest frequency and number of complaints were recorded in fall and the lowest in spring. In 2012, the highest rate was recorded in summer and the lowest in spring, in 2013, the highest in fall and the lowest in spring, in 2014, the highest in summer and lowest in winter, in 2015, the highest in fall and lowest in spring and winter, in 2016 highest in fall and lowest in winter, and in 2017, the highest rate was recorded in summer and lowest was recorded in spring.

4. Discussion

According to the results of this study, the number of complaints has been increasing in recent years. It can be justified that increasing the burden on clients on one hand, and the lack of promotion of human resources, on the other hand, is one of the factors contributing to the increase in dissatisfaction with clients. Reducing the causes of dissatisfaction and correcting them can reduce the burden of clients' dissatisfaction [21-24]. Also, dissatisfaction can be greatly reduced by informing the clients about the course of the treatment process [25].

Trzeciak et al. emphasized the same factors and insufficient capacity to treat patients as factors causing dissatisfaction [26]. In the study of Isfahani et al., patients admitted to surgical, neurosurgical, and internal medicine wards had a longer stay in the emergency department due to the length of counseling times and the reluctance of patients to undergo treatment by another service, and consequently, they were more dissatisfied [27].



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Figure 1. The frequency (%) of patients' complaints in the orthopedic ward of Taleghani hospital in Tehran from 2011 to 2017

In the study by Soleimanpour et al., the highest satisfaction was observed in the relationship between the patient and the physician, security officers, and nurses [28].

Zarei et al. assessed the impact of service quality on patient satisfaction in private hospitals in Iran and a strong and direct relationship was found between service quality and patient satisfaction. However, no significant relationship was found between the quality of the physical environment and patient satisfaction. These results are

in line with the results of this study indicating that the quality of service delivery in interpersonal relationships is a major cause of dissatisfaction [29].

Amoee et al. also reported that in surgical specialties, difficulties in surgical techniques, and surgeons' lack of knowledge regarding new surgical procedures, and in the internal medicine and pediatric fields, no adequate justification of patients before treatment and the lack of communication between the physician and patient have

Table 1. The frequency and percentage of patients' complaints in the orthopedic ward of Taleghani Hospital in Tehran from 2011 to 2017

| Year | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I |
|-------|----|-------|-----|-------|-----|-------|----|-------|-----|
| 2011 | 3 | 3.29 | 11 | 10 | 13 | 9.84 | 9 | 9.27 | 36 |
| 2012 | 4 | 4.39 | 15 | 13.63 | 7 | 5.3 | 8 | 8.24 | 64 |
| 2013 | 11 | 12.08 | 18 | 16.36 | 37 | 28.03 | 31 | 31.95 | 97 |
| 2014 | 34 | 37.36 | 21 | 19.09 | 20 | 15.15 | 14 | 14.13 | 89 |
| 2015 | 16 | 17.58 | 18 | 16.36 | 20 | 15.15 | 16 | 16.49 | 70 |
| 2016 | 17 | 18.68 | 13 | 11.81 | 24 | 18.18 | 11 | 11.34 | 65 |
| 2017 | 6 | 6.59 | 14 | 12.72 | 11 | 8.33 | 8 | 8.24 | 39 |
| Total | 91 | 100 | 110 | 100 | 132 | 100 | 97 | 100 | 460 |

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A. Number of complaints in spring; B. Percentage of complaints in spring; C. Number of complaints in summer; D. Percentage of complaints in summer; E. Number of complaints in fall; F. Percentage of complaints in fall; G. Number of complaints in winter; H. Percentage of complaints in winter; I. Total complaints

been the cause of complaints [30]. Ellis et al. showed that paying attention to patients during treatment can increase satisfaction and decrease patient complaints [31].

Jafari et al. reported that patients' complaints of hospitals and physicians have increased in recent years [32], which is in line with the present study. However, in the present study, after legal medicine consultation, patients' complaints declined.

Khomarnia et al. reported that the number of complaints registered in Shiraz public hospitals increased over a five-year period [33].

Similar results were obtained in the studies of Mirzaaghaeei, et al. and Siabani et al. [1, 34]. Also, Mirzaaghaeei, et al. showed that 62% of the total complaints of hospitals are related to physicians [1]. In the Anderson et al. study, the results showed that 1308 complaints were recorded in one of Australia's largest hospitals over a 30-month period [35].

Ebrahimipour et al. reported that the lack of satisfaction with health care services, inappropriate treatment, and lack of attention to welfare facilities are the most important causes of complaints in a hospital in Mashhad [36]. Rojas considered behavioral variables as the most important causes of patients' complaints about the health system [37]. Badakhshi et al. and Barriere et al. emphasized that the attention of health care providers to patients' rights is mandatory and also the observance of professional and ethical standards in health care providers plays an important role in reducing patient complaints [19, 38].

In the study by Sadeghi et al., it was observed that the number of complaints registered in public hospitals of Iran increased after the implementation of the health system evolution plan because it resulted in systematic registration and special attention to the complaints in the hospitals. Most of the complaints have also been recorded in the emergency department of hospitals [20].

Consistent with the present study, Ndetan et al. conducted a national survey of patients' complaints about the health system in the UK and 30% of respondents reported receiving advice/consulting from their provider, and 88% reported that the advice given to them caused a decrease in the rate of their complaints. Therefore, by providing appropriate information and advice, patients' complaints can be largely avoided [39].

Murff et al. showed that 19% of patients complained of problems after surgery [40]. Daniel et al. reported that 64% of patients complained of clinical care, 22% of poor physician-patient and nurse-patient communication, and inappropriate and immoral behaviors by physicians and nurses [41]. In general, patients' complaints about medical staff and hospitals can have various effects that have always been addressed in various studies, some of which were discussed in this article.

Athar et al. believed some factors can decrease the number of complaints, such as appropriate doctor-patient relationship, a full explanation of the treatment process, choosing patients appropriately, no exaggeration of treatment results, avoiding methods not trained yet, skilled and experienced physicians, observing medical ethics and professional commitment, continuous study and upgrading medical knowledge, and obtaining informed consent [42]. Parsapour et al. indicated that enhancing the doctor-patient relationship is an effective factor in preventing complaints [43].

Jafarian et al. showed that behaviors based on physicians' professional commitment to patients could prevent a majority of complaints [44]. Dargahi et al. in their study showed that there is no significant relationship between the number of complaints made by patients and their companions after the implementation of the Health Transformation Plan compared with before in the studied hospitals. There was also a positive and significant relationship between the number of complaints before and after the implementation of the Health Transformation Plan and the status of patients in the hospital, with complaints regarding the issues, including doctors and nurses, patients' life status, and type of hospitalization.

In general, after the implementation of the Health Transformation Plan, there was an increase in the number of patients' complaints of doctors and nurses, the condition of patients being treated, especially in outpatient wards; thus, in order to correct weaknesses in the hospital services, in this study, communication skills training courses were developed and implemented to strengthen the physician-patient-nurse-patient relationship, and the necessary arrangements were made to repair the indicators of the treatment process in the studied hospitals [45]. Aiken et al. showed that increasing the quality of care, favorable environmental conditions and low costs in European hospitals play a role in reducing patients' complaints of nurses [46]. Yu-Hua et al. also reported an increase in the frequency of patients' complaints of nurses due to disrespect to patients [47].

5. Conclusion

Legal medicine counseling in this study at Taleghani Hospital in Tehran, Iran reduced the number of registered complaints. It should be noted that to reduce the number of complaints, in addition to treating patients, the principle of respect for the patient should always be taken into consideration by all staff. In addition, improving the quality of services in the health system, reducing waiting time, and timely assignment of patients can significantly reduce the number of complaints, which in turn will improve the quality of services and increase the satisfaction of patients and their companions. Treatment and service teams should receive regular periodic monitoring, not only to improve their performance but also to significantly reduce their dissatisfaction.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

The Research Council and Ethics Committee of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences approved this study (IR.SBMU.RETECH.REC.1399.297).

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Author's contributions

Conceptualization: Reza Zandi and Mohammadreza Moshari; Methodology: Reza Zandi, Mohammadreza Moshari, and Mohammadreza Minator Sajjadi; Investigation: Farnoosh Davari; Writing - original draft: Reza Zandi and Amir Ali Mafi; Funding Acquisition: Mohammadreza Moshari; Resources: Amir Ali Mafi; Supervision: Mohammadreza Moshari.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interests.

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