

## Letters

### HIV-positive patients' satisfaction with service provided by a public hospital in Pretoria, South Africa

**To the Editor:** Patient satisfaction as a component of healthcare outcomes assessment plays an important role in the roll-out and delivery of health services. The assessment of patient satisfaction with the quality of service is usually used to evaluate factors influencing the utilization of healthcare delivery systems. This information is then used to address areas of concern identified.<sup>1,2</sup> In general, little is known about the level of satisfaction of patients on antiretroviral treatment in South Africa, and particularly at this healthcare facility. This explains why this study was conducted.

The aim of the study was to determine the levels of satisfaction, and dissatisfaction, with the quality of service and related factors among patients on antiretroviral treatment at a facility delivering such treatment in Pretoria.

A survey was conducted among patients treated at the antiretroviral unit of a public hospital situated in Pretoria via a structured questionnaire. Data collected included socio-demographic characteristics and patients' perception of the quality of service at the facility. Descriptive statistics were calculated, and a comparison of the level of patient satisfaction was made based on the gender of respondents.

Based on a response rate of 85.1% of the 410 patients approached to participate, overall 60.7% were satisfied with the service received. Over 80% of respondents were black Africans, female, younger than 35 years, and lived in Pretoria. With regard to satisfaction, although 60.7% were satisfied with the service they received in the facility, female patients were more satisfied than male (75.4% vs 34.4%;  $p < 0.01$ ). Among those who were dissatisfied, the reasons for their dissatisfaction were long queues (67.9%), lack of chairs (48.1%), not enough waiting space (14.6%), lack of privacy (11.7%), and disrespect from some staff members (5.8%). The opinion of the majority of patients was that they always received their medication and that the staff members at the facility were easy to talk to, competent, polite, and wore their nametags. Moreover, the majority of respondents (78.2%) were satisfied with the opening and closing times of the facility, its cleanliness status (90.2%), and its user-friendliness (80.8%) for disabled people.

Although female patients were more satisfied than males, the level of satisfaction of 60.7% is low when compared to reports from other facilities in Pretoria.<sup>3</sup> Many issues led to patient dissatisfaction. In this study, issues linked to the clinic's infrastructure and staffing status have been mentioned as the

main reasons for dissatisfaction. These include space, seating, and the associated problem of lack of privacy, as well as long queues leading to extended waiting times. Although the majority of patients perceived the number of staff members at the facility as adequate, it appears that there is still a shortage of staff given the number of patients treated. This may explain why there are long queues. However, the findings from this study are contrary to reports by Couper et al<sup>4</sup> who reported that the dissatisfaction among the respondents they interviewed was about two issues, namely shortage of medicines, as well as staff attitude and behaviour towards patients. In our study, the majority of respondents stated that they always got their medication and were satisfied with how they related to members of staff. This is encouraging, since previous studies at some Gauteng institutions reported that one in every three respondents rated nurses' attitudes as bad.<sup>5</sup> It is also encouraging that the professionalism of staff members was appreciated by the patients as they rated their service providers as competent, easy to talk to, and polite. In light of the above findings, it is necessary for the management at this facility to support their staff in maintaining these positive aspects and to attend to infrastructural issues in the context of improving the quality of healthcare.<sup>6,7</sup> As a limitation of this study, staff members who could also have provided their views on the issues raised were not interviewed. Further studies should incorporate staff members and healthcare managers.

In conclusion, although the majority of patients on antiretroviral treatment at this facility were satisfied with the quality of service, there is still a need to improve its infrastructure.

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