

Users' assessment of the functioning of a university dental clinic

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to understand the users' perception of the quality of services provided in the dental clinic of a private university. This is a quantitative cross-sectional study carried out at a university in Northeastern Brazil. Data were collected using a questionnaire with 35 closed-ended questions on the quality of clinical care, including structural and organizational aspects of the education institution, applied at the reception of clinics from February to November 2019. Of the 203 participants, 196 (96.6%) felt respected by the professionals; 195 (96.0%) reported that they never had their service interrupted due to lack of material or problems with equipment; and 201 (99.0%) said they would recommend clinical care to friends and family. Regarding comfort during care, 183 (90.1%) felt satisfied and 177 (87.2%) rated the clinic's facilities as very good. The users' perception of the university dental clinic was considered very good regarding user embracement; positive regarding the bond and satisfaction with the service; and there was a sufficient quantity of inputs and equipment to provide a quality service.

Descriptors: Education, Dental. Dental Care. Quality Control. Patient Satisfaction.

1 INTRODUCTION

Since the provision of clinical dental services to the population does not guarantee that these are carried out with quality, it is necessary to use parameters with a view to evaluating and improving health care. The evaluation process is carried out through actions, which verify compliance with standards pre-created by the

government or institutions, seeking to improve access and quality of services provided in health¹.

From an academic point of view, universities concentrate on carrying out assessments by collecting opinions from professors and students, eventually leaving the opinion of patients – who play an extremely

important role in teaching clinics – in the background. These patients should not be understood as mere learning tools; they should be treated with respect and receive the recommended treatment and feel satisfied with all aspects involved in their care².

User satisfaction surveys provide for improvement in the daily services provided, as users' views are an important tool for diagnosing reality and thus allow intervention to improve quality care³. Users' perception of the dental care provided by university students and services in general allows for a better understanding of the factors related to quality care. In addition to receiving feedback on the services offered and eventual improvement in the role of health service providers, the development of the professional-patient relationship is of fundamental importance to establish understanding between the parties involved, since the more the professional understands what the patient seeks, the more favorable the care will be^{4,5}.

Studies show that search for services and user satisfaction are not closely linked to the technical and scientific aspects themselves, but to the way they are treated and the solution of oral problems⁶. The guiding role of assessments of health services in relation to the performance of service providers is indisputable. The assessment process must serve as a transformation instrument in the search for advancement in the quality of care⁷.

Assessment is a way of contributing to construction and improvement, and it must be permanent, systematic, dynamic and articulated with the actions implemented and seek to identify difficulties, guide strategies and organize health services. It is an indispensable tool for improving the quality of actions and care of people, families and the community as a whole⁸.

Thus, this study aimed to understand users'

perception of the quality of services provided in the dental clinic of a private university.

2 METHODS

This is a quantitative cross-sectional study carried out in the dental clinic of a private university located in the city of Fortaleza, Ceará, and previously approved by the institutional Research Ethics Committee (Approval No. 3.192.914, CAAE 7604918.3.0000.5052). All research participants signed an Informed Consent Form.

Created in 1973, the University of Fortaleza has 25 thousand students and circa 1,200 professors across various undergraduate and graduate courses. It has been classified as the best private higher education institution in the North and Northeast regions according to the 2019 Folha University Ranking and is among the best universities in the world up to 50 years old according to the Times Higher Education Young University Ranking 2020. One of the 40 undergraduate courses is the Dentistry course. Established in 1995, it has 100 dental offices, a 24-hour sterilization center, laboratories, a radiology center and classrooms.

Data were collected using a questionnaire based on questions used in the assessment form adopted by the National Quality Improvement Program (*Programa Nacional de Melhoria da Qualidade – PMAQ*) of the Ministry of Health. Data were collected by a single researcher trained to apply the questionnaire with the purpose of avoiding interference in the responses. Participants were invited to participate in the study on the premises and reception of the clinic on weekdays in the morning, afternoon and evening.

Sample calculation considered the estimated number of patients (412) to be seen at the dental clinic in the first half of 2019. Using a significance level of 95% and a sampling error of

0.05 resulted in 203 participants. People over 18 years of age who had already been served at least once at the clinic were randomly included.

Data collection was carried out between February and November 2019. Data were consolidated and organized in an electronic spreadsheet. The analysis consisted of descriptive statistics using frequency, measure of central tendency (mean) and measure of dispersion (standard deviation).

3 RESULTS

Table 1 depicts data on the profile of the participants, mostly female (n=143; 70.4%); aged between 18 and 82 years (42.8 ± 15.4 years), single (n =91; 44.8%); self-declared White (n =79; 38.9%); residents in the city of Fortaleza (n =189; 93.1%); with at least completed secondary education (n=110; 54.2%); paid work (n=114; 56.2%); and household income of 1 to 2 minimum wages (n=102; 50.2%).

Table 1. Participants' profile.

Variables		n	%
<i>Sex</i>	Male	60	29.6
	Female	143	70.4
<i>Marital status</i>	Single	91	44.8
	Married/Common-law marriage	89	43.9
	Separated/Divorced	15	7.4
	Widowed	8	3.9
<i>Resident in the municipality</i>	Yes	189	93.1
	No	14	6.9
<i>Level of education</i>	Illiterate	4	2.0
	Literate	12	5.9
	Incomplete primary education	34	16.7
	Complete primary education	33	21.2
	Complete secondary education	84	41.3
	Complete higher education	16	7.9
<i>Paid work</i>	Yes	114	56.2
	No	89	43.8
<i>Income</i>	No income	13	6.4
	Less than 1 wage	50	24.6
	1 to 2 wages	102	50.2
	More than 2 wages	38	18.8

Table 2 shows the results of the questionnaire regarding user embracement and the service provided to the participants. The majority rated the service as very good (n=176; 86.7%); claimed to be always respected by professionals (n=196; 96.6%); felt comfortable during the service (n=183; 90.1%); received

guidance from students and teachers (n=187; 92.1%); and managed to solve their dental problem (n=134; 66.0%).

Table 3 shows data on bonding and accountability. Most participants said: there was clarification about their treatment (n=200; 98.50%); they were called by their names (n=193;

95.1%); it was easy to answer questions after consultations (n=107; 52.7%); they never interrupted treatment (n=115; 56.7%); they did not need to be referred to another clinic/specialty

(n=102; 50.2%); and the care received from the student had been very good (n=184; 90.6%). The service provided at the reception was considered very good by 168 participants (82.7%).

Table 2. Participants' assessment of user embracement and care

Variables		n	%
User embracement at the dental clinic	Very good	176	86.7
	Good	20	9.9
	Fair	5	2.5
	Poor	2	0.9
Respected by professionals	Always	196	96.6
	Sometimes	6	2.9
	No	1	0.5
Comfort during office appointments	Very good	183	90.1
	Good	18	8.9
	Fair	2	1.0
Received guidance about care in recovery from professionals	Always	187	92.1
	Sometimes	15	7.4
	Never	1	0.5
Completed some treatment at the clinic	Yes	93	45.8
	No	110	54.2
Considered the dental problem	Solved	134	66.0
	Not solved	69	34.0

Table 3. Participants' assessment of bonding and accountability

Variables		n	%
There were clarifications about the treatment	Yes	200	98.5
	No	3	1.5
Students call them out by their names	Yes	193	95.1
	No	10	4.9
Remember what happened in the last consultations	Yes	192	94.6
	No	5	2.5
	Don't know	6	2.9
It is easy to ask for clarifications after the consultations	Always	107	52.7
	Sometimes	20	9.9
	No	4	2.0
	Didn't need to	72	35.4
When treatment is interrupted, they are sought to resume it	Yes, by the staff	44	21.7
	Yes, by the students	35	17.2
	No	9	4.4
	Never interrupted	115	56.7
Satisfaction with the care received from students	Very good	184	90.6
	Good	19	9.4
	Fair/Poor	-	-
Satisfaction with the service received at reception	Very good	168	82.7
	Good	29	14.3
	Fair/Poor	06	3.0

Table 4 presents the results regarding aspects of the structure of the dental clinic. Most participants said they had enough seats at the reception (n=190; 93.6%); the clinic was in good clean conditions (n=200; 98.5%); and the clinic facilities were very good (n=177; 87.2%). As for having the treatment interrupted due to lack of materials, only eight participants (4%) answered yes.

As for the possibility of undergoing dental treatment elsewhere, most participants (n=186;

91.6%) said they would not seek it. For those who signaled such possibility, the reasons for doing so were: the location was far from home (n=06; 35.3%), unfavorable opening hours (n=4; 23.5%), poor service (n=1; 6.0%), other reasons (n=6; 35.2%).

With regard to credibility, most patients (n=201; 99.0%) would recommend the clinic to friends or family. The service was considered very good by most users (n=185; 91.1%).

Table 4. Participants' assessment of inputs, equipment, ambience and credibility

Variables		n	%
The service has already been interrupted	Yes	8	4.0
	No	195	96.0
There are enough seats at the reception	Yes	190	93.6
	No	13	6.4
The clinic facilities are in good clean conditions	Yes	200	98.5
	No	3	1.5
Rated the clinic's facilities as	Very good	177	87.2
	Good	25	12.3
	Fair/Poor	1	0.5
Would have their dental treatment elsewhere	Yes	17	8.4
	No	186	91.6
If yes, why?	Far from home	6	35.3
	Opening hours	4	23.5
	Poor service	1	6.0
	Other	6	35.2
Would recommend this clinic to a friend or family member	Yes	201	99.0
	No	2	1.0
Service rating	Very good	185	91.1
	Good	15	7.4
	Fair/Poor	3	1.5

4 DISCUSSION

The professional performance that recognizes the human and social natures as intrinsic to the act of caring has become predominant in the relationship established between the professional and the user⁹. When asked about the characteristics of user

embracement and care delivered to the participants in the present study, a large number of users considered the service provided at the dental clinic to be very good, and most stated that they felt comfortable during the clinical service.

It should be noted that the dental clinic of the private university adopts a protocol at the

beginning of the service consisting of the delivery of an individual protection kit for patients containing disposable items (cap, bib and tissue for facial cleaning). Additionally, glasses for personal protection are provided. These precautions adopted by the institution strictly comply with biosafety rules¹⁰.

User embracement is collectively built upon the analysis of work processes and the development of a relationship of trust, commitment and bonding between teams/services, worker/teams and users with their socio-affective networks¹¹. In this study, a large number of respondents, 96.6% of users, reported feeling respected by all professionals whom they had contact with, starting with the reception of the clinic, then with guidance received by the social worker, then being referred to the triage room and, later, the clinical care provided by university students.

The PMAQ highlights the user embracement and bonding processes in the teams' practices¹². These findings appeared in the investigation when it became evident that patients are called out by their names and that a high percentage of users (98.5%) received clarifications about their treatment during care. Also, most patients (56.7%) reported never having interrupted treatment.

This shows a high percentage of bonding and how much patients feel motivated and are not absent from the appointments scheduled by students at the dental clinic, which, in most cases, are weekly. A study carried out in Rio Grande do Sul emphasizes the importance of the bond in relation to the production of care in clinical practices, characterized by a welcoming of listening to and dialoguing with the user, which produces the agreement of a therapeutic plan, thereby making the treatment more humanized¹³.

As for the possibility of having dental treatment in another place, the majority (91.6%)

indicated that they would not seek it, as they felt satisfied with the care received from students and staff, and 99% reported that they would recommend the university dental clinic to friends and or family members.

These results reinforce the patients' trust in the service. A study carried out in the South Fluminense region of the state of Rio de Janeiro highlighted the importance of the relationship between health professionals and patients, as the more the professional understands the user's needs, the more favorable the care will be¹⁴.

It is known that having a good quality of supplies, equipment and ambience is essential for the patient to enjoy quality care. Problems in this structural organizational sphere compromise care and the full use of the installed capacity of existing services^{15,16}. Regarding the structural aspect, the study also confirmed the satisfaction of users, as 93.6% reported contentment with the number of seats available in the waiting area.

When asked about the cleaning services of the dental clinic, most users (98.5%) stated that the clinic was in good clean conditions, which corroborates other studies carried out in university dental clinics in other states^{17,18}.

This study was limited by the presentation of only descriptive results and the fact that it was carried out with participants from different non-representative age groups, whose answers cannot be generalized. Taking into account the importance of knowing users' perception of the quality of the service provided, it is recommended that the institution always carry out research applied to its users to identify the quality of the services offered, and whether there is a need for improvements.

5 CONCLUSION

The users' perception of the university dental clinic was considered very good regarding the user embracement; positive with regard to the bond and

satisfaction with the service; and there was a sufficient quantity of inputs and equipment to provide a quality service.

RESUMO

Avaliação dos usuários sobre o funcionamento de uma clínica odontológica universitária

Este estudo teve por objetivo conhecer a percepção dos usuários sobre a qualidade dos serviços prestados na clínica odontológica de uma universidade privada. Trata-se de estudo transversal de abordagem quantitativa, que teve como cenário uma universidade do nordeste brasileiro. A coleta de dados foi realizada por meio de questionário com 35 perguntas objetivas relacionadas à qualidade do atendimento clínico, incluindo aspectos estruturais e organizacionais da instituição de ensino, aplicados na recepção das clínicas, no período de fevereiro a novembro de 2019. Dentre os 203 participantes, 196 (96,6%) sentiram-se respeitados pelos profissionais; 195 (96,0%) informaram que nunca tiveram o atendimento interrompido por falta de material ou problema com equipamentos; e 201 (99,0%) recomendariam o atendimento clínico a amigos e familiares. Sobre o conforto durante atendimento, 183 (90,1%) sentiram-se satisfeitos e 177 (87,2%) avaliaram as instalações da clínica como muito boas. A percepção dos usuários da clínica odontológica universitária foi considerada muito boa quanto ao acolhimento; positiva quanto ao vínculo e satisfação no atendimento; e com quantidade de insumos e equipamentos suficientes para prestação de serviço com qualidade.

Descritores: Ensino Odontológico. Assistência Odontológica. Controle de Qualidade. Satisfação do Paciente.

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