

**Measuring patients' experiences:  
How can we make health care systems work for patients?**

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ABSTRACT

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This paper focuses on the patient's perspective on health care quality. We look first at data on patients' experience of hospital care in five countries: US, UK, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland. Having identified the extent and nature of the problems from the patient's point of view, we then describe various policy initiatives that have been taken in the US and the UK to try to improve the patient's experience, looking at research evidence on the actual and likely impact of these.

One of the conclusions of the paper is that even though the hospitals studied are not necessarily representative of all hospitals in the study countries, the results offer compelling evidence that there are major deficits in the quality of care in all the countries studied and wide variations between countries that might provide evidence about how organisations and providers in different countries could meet patient needs most effectively.

It is extremely difficult to interpret the differences among countries for both methodological and substantive reasons. For example, one might argue that patients' view of appropriate care might differ substantially among the countries studied. Care needs to be taken to verify that the questions asked are salient and important in each of the countries studied. Nevertheless, we think systematically studying and trying to understand the system differences that might account for the differences observed can be productive.

The traditional approach of feeding back patient survey results to providers has produced some successes in the US and in the UK, but lack of clear incentives to use the data, and perhaps lack of knowledge about how to improve the processes asked about, have limited the effectiveness of this strategy.

Public disclosure looks more promising. It has had only limited effect to date but there are signs that patients are becoming more sophisticated as consumers of health services and are increasingly willing to shop around to secure the "best" quality. Measures of patient experience may prove easier for patients to interpret than other measures of performance such as mortality rates. Even so, it will be important to ensure that these measures are valid, reliable and comprehensible to those who they are intended. Awareness that these data are publicly available may prove to be an effective incentive for providers to ensure that their services are truly patient-oriented.