

Title

Patients as Partners: A Journey Towards Comprehensive Measurement

Authors

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Background/Context

In Ontario, the primary care sector is moving towards a more comprehensive patient-centred approach to quality health care delivery. In order to fully understand whether primary care has reached this goal of quality there needs to be a way to measure both the comprehensiveness and patient-centred aspects of care. To measure patient-centeredness one must understand what is important to patients. Currently, measures surrounding patient experience, such as satisfaction, are considered separately from more clinical measures like readmission to hospital or cancer screening rates. Patient input is considered alongside but not incorporated into the indicators commonly used in primary care performance measurement, creating the potential for competition in interest and importance between them. The Association of Family Health Teams (AFHTO) is a not-for-profit membership organization of primary care providers. A key strategy of AFHTO is improving access to and use of data to measure, improve and demonstrate the value of comprehensive, team-based, patient-centered primary care.

Objectives

The main objective of this project was to determine which indicators are important to patients, and in what way. This information would then be incorporated into a quality “roll-up” or composite indicator based on performance on common clinical measures, weighting them according to their relative priority for patients. The resulting quality roll-up indicator can therefore better reflect the comprehensiveness of care (by virtue of including many component measures) as well as the patient-centeredness of care through the weighting of performance according to patient input.

Measures

Process

- Satisfaction of Patients Canada with the collaboration to get patient input.
- Response rate of patients

Outcome

- Weights to be applied to each indicator, based on their relative importance to patients in the context of their relationship with their doctor.

Change Concepts

Patient input was sought through an online survey. The survey was developed in collaboration with volunteer patient representatives from Patients Canada and iterative discussions with a broader group of Patients Canada members. The survey consisted of a set of 2 questions for each indicator. The first asked about the importance of the indicator and the second about the importance of the indicator to the patient’s relationship with their doctor. The patients’ relationship to their doctor (patient-doctor partnership) was measured in terms of 6 aspects of the relationship known as domains. These were based on the literature and included such things as trust, sensitivity and knowledge etc. The survey was

distributed to patients via Patients Canada’s email network of approximately 2000 members, along with being promoted via their Facebook and Twitter pages.

Outcomes and Results/Lessons Learned

Over 200 patients participated in the survey. The majority of the respondents indicated that they heard about the survey via Patients Canada. The results of the survey showed that patients do feel that certain indicators are more important to them than others (Figure 1). Based on these data, weights were derived to calculate a composite measure of quality (quality roll-up indicator) which was included in AFHTO’s membership wide performance measurement report, Data to Decisions 2.0. Patients Canada and AFHTO were both very satisfied with the collaboration. Both organizations have shared their stories about the project online and at conferences.

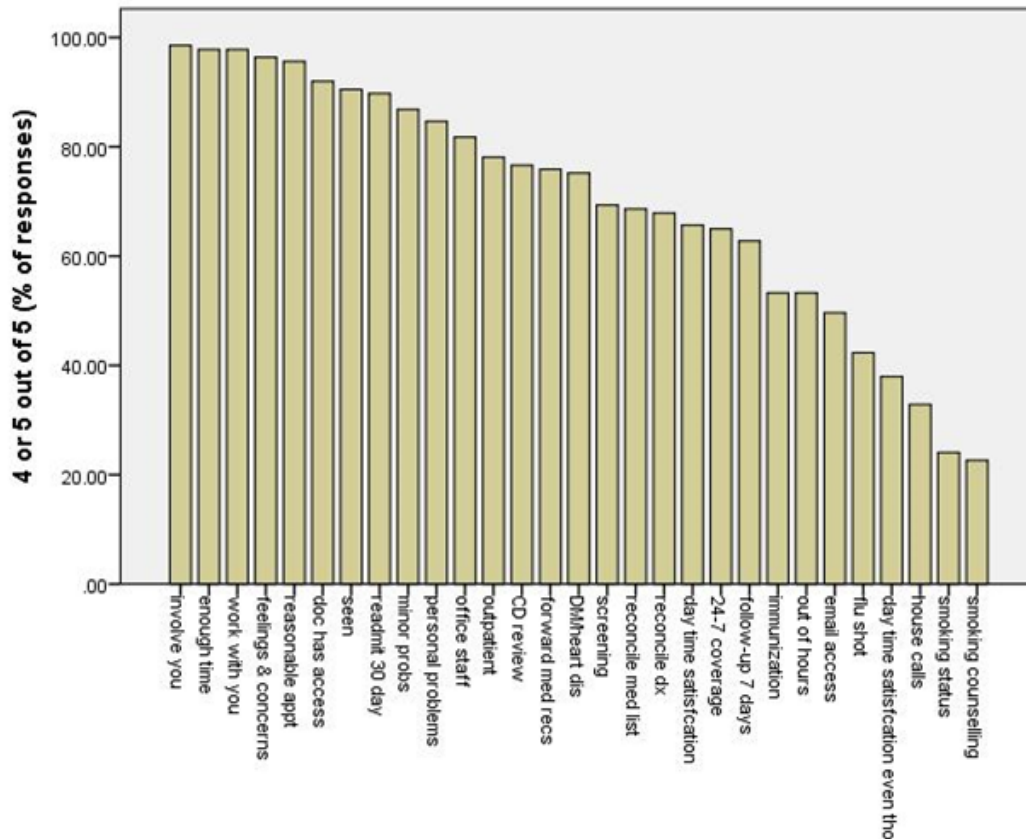


Figure 1: Indicators in decreasing level of importance as determined by patients

The collaboration with Patients Canada was integral to the success of the survey. Accessing their extensive patient network was important in getting a good response rate. Even more important was the collaboration in the development of the survey, which ensured that it met AFHTO’s needs while also framing the questions in a way that was clear and simple for patients to read and respond to. An incidental finding of the survey was that over half of the participants indicated that they want an equal partnership with their doctor when it comes to decision-making around their care. This validates the original premise that it was important to ask patients what is important to them and further emphasizes the need to incorporate patient input concretely into measurement of quality in primary care.

It was possible to determine patient priorities by survey. However, we are less certain of the validity of our measures regarding the domains of the patient-doctor. Further work is needed to refine the second level questions so they are clearer to patients. What matters to patients also matters to providers. Other provider groups have expressed interest in repeating the survey with specific patient groups to determine what their priorities are. This will add to the body of knowledge about the extent to which patient expectations of their relationship with their doctors vary according to geography or clinical conditions experienced by the patients.