

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Assessment of Awareness of Health Rights among Patients Coming To Outdoor Patient Department of Services Hospital, Lahore

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ABSTRACT

Background: Patients' rights are the basic human rights and essential part of modern healthcare practice. The interaction between the patients and doctors is governed by the rights of the patients. Thus every patient has the right to be informed about their health rights.

Aim: To assess the patients' awareness of their rights in outdoor patients of Services Hospital, Lahore according to Patients' rights charter (PRC) by Punjab Healthcare Commission.

Methodology: A descriptive cross-sectional study was done. The research sample of 200 outdoor patients was specified. Data was collected by interviewing the patients and questionnaire according to patients' rights charter by Punjab Healthcare Commission was filled. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 25. For quantitative variable mean and standard deviation was calculated and for qualitative variables Chi-square test was applied.

Results: Out of 200 patients, 173(86.50%) patients were not aware of the Patients' rights charter. Media was the major source of awareness of patients' rights for 111(55.50%) patients. Maximum awareness was about the right to be treated with empathy, respect and nobility irrespective of any discrimination, 188(94%) were aware of this right. While the least awareness was about the right to be made full aware of full identity and professional status of healthcare provider, only 106(53%) were aware about this right. A statistically significant relation ($P \leq 0.05$) was found between awareness of patients and their gender, educational status, occupation and average income/month.

Conclusion: Overall awareness of patients of their rights was unsatisfactory. Patients should be educated about their basic health rights and how they must be treated in hospitals.

Keywords: Patients' rights, Punjab Healthcare Commission Charter.

INTRODUCTION

Health is a basic human right recognized in WHO constitution which states that the attainment of highest standard of physical, social and mental health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being regardless of any discrimination based on race, religion, political beliefs and economic or social condition¹. Patients are one of the most vulnerable social groups who are in danger physically and economically which led international assemblies to pay special attention to them and their rights².

In 2004, WHO attempted to spread awareness and empower people by establishing World Alliance so that the rights of patients are secured³. The World Health Organization affirms that each country should establish its own charter to secure patient's rights⁴. WHO also published a detailed document in Amsterdam to improve patient's rights in Europe representing a series of principles and strategies to give patients a complete healthcare environment⁵. Afterwards the Egyptian Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP) launched the patient's bill of rights and imposed it in all hospitals across the country since 2005⁶. Hence it is important to consider these rights in the charters to improve the quality of healthcare services⁷.

WHO briefs these rights which includes right of suitable care and treatment of high quality, right to have complete information about disease and suitable treatment, right to free will, right of confidentiality, right to get compensation for any loss and right to have an informed consent and to refuse any treatment one doesn't want to

get⁸. There is a whole lot of people who are unaware of the rights they deserve and that must be given to them. A cross sectional study held in Turkey showed that only 9% of the respondents had awareness about their rights while 91% needed extensive awareness⁹.

In Saudi Arabia similar studies showed that there was lack of awareness of their rights among 75% of patients¹⁰. In India, a study revealed that 71% of the respondents were aware of their right to confidentiality, 65% their right to be informed, 58% to access to healthcare but 39% had awareness in case of patients' right to informed consent¹¹.

In Pakistan, the only set of rules governing the practice of doctors is the 'code of ethics' devised by Pakistan Medical and Dental Council¹². To provide ethical healthcare, ministry of Punjab Health Commission (PHC) formulated charter of patient's rights and enforced it to all the hospitals across the province¹³. Sindh government is also attempting to devise such charter¹⁴. A study conducted in Pakistan showed that 74% of patients in govt. Hospital and 55% in private hospitals are unaware of their rights¹⁵. In tertiary care hospitals of Rawalpindi, the level of awareness of most of the patients was overall unsatisfactory¹⁶.

Awareness of people regarding their own rights as patients can remarkably change the quality of healthcare services. It can bring a lot of other improvements in terms of reduction in costs, prompt recovery, decreased hospital 'stay and physical and psychological damages and eventually increased dignity of patients. Therefore, it was imperative to conduct this study to assess the awareness of patients regarding their rights.

The objective of the study was to assess the patients' awareness of their rights in OPD of Services Hospital,

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Lahore according to Patients' rights charter (PRC) by Punjab Healthcare Commission.

METHODOLOGY

This cross sectional study was carried out in outdoor department of Services hospital Lahore from Feb 2019 to May 2019. The sample size was estimated by using WHO statistical software S-size. At confidence level of 95%, anticipated population proportion of 32%¹⁰ and relative precision of 10%, a sample size of 200 patients was taken. The written informed consent was taken from all the patients and by administering a questionnaire, data was collected using non-probability convenient sampling technique. The questionnaire had two parts. The first part of questionnaire was about the demographic characteristics of patients while the second part was to assess their awareness regarding their rights. All the patients of 18 years and above were selected. Statistical analysis was done using SPSS version 25. During descriptive interpretation of data, the continuous variables were expressed as mean and standard deviation. Frequency and percentages were computed for categorical data. Chi-square was applied to predict any association and was considered statistically significant if p value was ≤0.05. Ethical considerations were made.

RESULT

After fulfilling inclusion criteria, data from a total of 200 outdoor patients was collected. The majority of patients, 107(53.50%) were females and 93(46.50%) were males. Mean age was 30.72 ± 10.61 years. 113(56.50%) patients were unemployed, 37(18.50%) were self-employed, 36(18.00%) were private sector employees and 14(7%) were government employees. Average income of 84(42%) respondents was below 10,000Rs. per month, 56(28%) have between 10001 to 25000, while 50(25%) have between 25001 to 50000 and 10(5%) have more than Rs.50,000/- per month.

Figure 1 shows that 39.50% of patients had university level education while 17.50% were illiterate. 30.50% of patients had secondary level education and 12.50% had primary level education. Major source of awareness of patients' rights was media. 111(55.50%) patients got awareness from media, 53(26.50%) got awareness from their friends and family while 23(11.50%) got awareness from health personnel and 13(6.50%) had other sources of awareness (books, posters etc).

Chi square test was applied between different health rights and gender of the patients which shows a significant difference as shown in table 2. Table 3 shows a significant

association between different health rights and level of education of the respondents.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of patients aware of the patients' health rights charter by Punjab Healthcare Commission (PHC). Only 13.50% were aware of this charter while 86.50% never heard about this charter

Fig. 1: Education level of patients

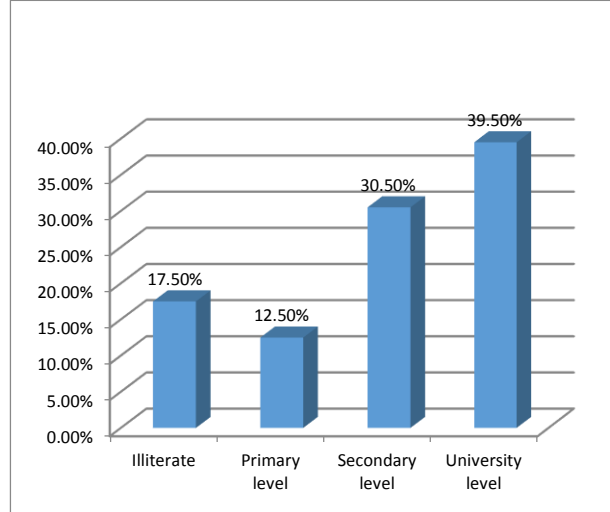


Fig. 2: Awareness of patients' health rights charter by Punjab Healthcare Commission:

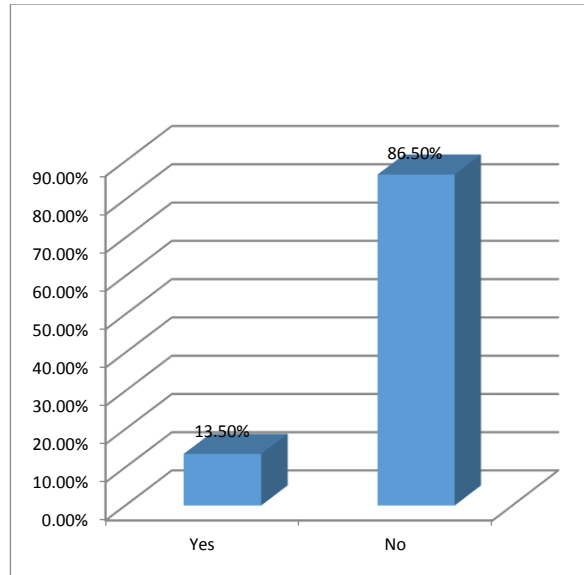


Table 1: Patient's rights and their Awareness

The patient has the right to the following:	Awareness Frequency	Awareness %	Awareness order
Rights Of Information			
Get easy access to helpdesk and guided to respective services	182	91%	3
Made aware of professional identity and status of health personnel	106	53%	17
To be informed to make health choices for his treatment plans	134	67%	12
Given informed consent in an understandable language	144	72%	8
Made aware of all the treatment expenses prior to the start of it and receive payment receipts for the same	132	66%	13
Rights of Autonomy			
To seek second opinion and maybe assisted by healthcare establishment in this regard	143	71.50%	9
To access his own record and obtain copies thereof	140	70%	10
To accept or refuse any medical treatment and procedure prescribed to him	129	64.50%	15
To accept or refuse to be a participant in any research related to his treatment or disease	131	65.50%	14
Rights of Equality			
To be treated without any discrimination	180	90%	4
To be treated with honor, responsiveness and decency	188	94%	1
To be treated with respect of his religious and cultural beliefs.	187	93.50%	2
To receive emergency healthcare, unconditionally	180	90%	4
Rights of Confidentiality			
His personal information is to kept secure and confidential	147	73.50%	7
To be treated in privacy	170	85%	5
Female patients to be examined in the presence of a family member or a female staff	156	78%	6
Rights against Malpractice			
To register complaint to the concerned healthcare personnel	135	67.50%	11
To ask for compensation if he/she has been treated with harm	113	56.80%	16

Table 2: Association between different health rights and gender

Questions	Male	Female	P value
Made aware of professional identity ad status of health personnel	60(30%)	46(23%)	0.002
Aware of right to access his own medical record and obtain copies thereof	77(38.5%)	63(31.5%)	0.001
Aware of right to be treated without any discrimination based on age, gender, ethnicity and culture	90(96.8%)	90(84.1%)	0.003
Aware of right to be treated with honor, responsiveness and decency	91(97.8%)	97(90.7%)	0.03
Aware of right of female patients to be examined in the presence of a family member or female staff	80(86%)	76(71%)	0.01
Aware of right to ask for compensation if he/she has been treated with harm	62(67.4%)	51(47.7%)	0.005

Table 3: Association between different patients' rights and education level

Questions	Illiterate (n=35)	Primary level (n=25)	Secondary level(n=61)	University level (n=79)	P-value
Aware of right to be informed to make health choices for his treatment plans	14(40%)	9(36%)	44(72.1%)	67(84.8%)	0
Aware of right to be given informed consent in an understandable language	16(45.7%)	13(52%)	48(78.7%)	67(84.8%)	0
Aware of right to be made aware of all the treatment expenses prior to start of it and receive payment receipts for the same	11(31.4%)	7(28%)	48(78.7%)	66(83.5%)	0
Aware of right to accept or refuse any medical treatment and procedure prescribed to him	17(48.6%)	14(56%)	38(62.3%)	60(75.9%)	0.025
Aware of right to accept or refuse to be a participant in any research related to his treatment or disease	15(42.9%)	16(64%)	45(73.8%)	55(69.6%)	0.015
Aware of right to be treated without any discrimination based on age, gender, ethnicity and culture	32(91.4%)	19(76%)	59(96.7%)	70(88.6%)	0.033
Aware of right that his personal information to be kept secure and confidential	20(57.1%)	15(60%)	47(77%)	65(82.3%)	0.14
Aware of right of female patients to be examined in the presence of a family member or female staff	33(94.3%)	16(64%)	45(73.8%)	62(78.5%)	0.03
Aware of right to register complaint to the concerned healthcare personnel	16(45.7%)	21(84%)	38(62.3%)	60(75.9%)	0.003

DISCUSSION

In our study, we have observed the awareness of patients regarding their rights mentioned in Patients' Rights Charter by Punjab Healthcare Commission, attending outpatient department of Services Hospital, Lahore. Our findings show that a good proportion of patients (86.50%) were

unaware of the charter of their rights. It was in accordance with the study carried out in Minia University, Upper Egypt according to which 76.30% respondents were unaware about the patient's rights charter¹⁸ and Abou Zeina et al. in Beni-Suef University Hospital, Egypt¹⁹. But contrary to our approximation, Ghanem et al. reported that 27% of patients

in Alexandria Main University Hospital and 53% of patients in Matrouh General Hospital had no knowledge about the charter of their rights²⁰.

According to this study almost half (55.5%) of our respondents got information of their rights from media, which was the main source of awareness. Family and friends (26.50%) and health personnel (11.50%) were the other sources of awareness. This was in agreement with Abou Zeina et al. which reported the mass media as a major source of information for patients' knowledge of their rights (89.4%)¹⁹. In contrast to it, a study in Upper Egypt, Minia showed that the main source of information for the patients about their charter of rights was physicians then come placards on the walls of their hospitals and media comes at the end of information sources list¹⁸. This was in agreement with a study in Saudi Arabia where doctors and nurses were on top of the list of main source of awareness²¹.

Different scores were obtained for different rights. The patients were mostly aware of their right to have easy access to helpdesk and guided to respective services. 182 respondents were aware of this right. It is in accordance with the study carried out in India where 90% were aware about their right to have easy access with respect and dignity²².

The least awareness was about the right to be made aware of full identity and professional status of healthcare provider. In a study carried out in Iran, patients' awareness of their right about getting to know health care professionals was also in low level²³. In another study carried out in Minia University, ~85% of patients stated that the health teams did not give any type of introduction about themselves¹⁸. A study in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia showed almost 97.3% did not know the name of their health care providers²¹.

In our study we have also evaluated association between awareness of rights and other socio-demographic parameters like gender and educational status. There was an association between awareness and educational status of the patient ($P < 0.05$). In Upper Egypt study, education was an important factor for awareness too, as what has been stated in an Iranian study also²³. Education was found to significantly associated with awareness of several rights in this study. This was comparable with study findings from Turkey²⁴.

In this study males were more aware about their rights than females. Similar results were found in Upper Egypt study¹⁸. In a study carried out in Rawalpindi, Pakistan the difference of level of awareness among males and females was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$)¹⁶. In developing countries like Pakistan and Egypt, males are more privileged than females and thus are able to have access to more information than females as found in our study. This finding was comparable with studies in India¹¹.

Association between awareness of the rights and occupation and economic status of the respondents was also present. These results are comparable with the study carried out on the inpatients of tertiary care teaching hospital, India¹¹ and the study carried out in Dhaka, Bangladesh ($P < 0.05$)²⁵.

The main limitation of this study was the small sample size that included only one hospital. As this study was conducted among outdoor patients from a single hospital;

hence the results cannot be generalized to the awareness of all Pakistani patients.

CONCLUSION

Out of 200 patients, 173 patients (86.50%) were not aware of the Patients' rights charter. Maximum awareness was about the right to be treated with empathy, respect and nobility irrespective of any discrimination. While the least awareness was about the right to be made full aware of full identity and professional status of healthcare provider. Overall awareness of patients of their rights was unsatisfactory. Observance of patients' rights is a reasonable answer by health care organizations for responding to patients' needs. This is possible not only by well informed healthcare policy makers and providers but also by the educated and aware citizens who know what to expect from healthcare professionals when they enter the healthcare facilities and from government when such laws are not acted upon. This can be done by using brochures or pamphlets in simple language and pictorial messages can be given to the patients and also to their family or relatives.

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