

ABSTRACT

Consumer Appraisal of Health Services and its Impact on their Utilisation Behaviour - A Comparative Study of Public, Semi Public and Private Health Facilities in Jamaica

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The public health care system is now unable to meet the complexity of the demands because of organisational and managerial deficiencies, economic, financial and human constraints, and changing consumer preferences.

The purpose of this study was to examine those factors consumers considered important in choosing a health facility for meeting their primary health care needs and to provide this information to health care providers so that more consumers - friendly services can be delivered.

A survey was carried out over a 21 day period on a sample of 135 consumers selected using the accidental haphazard or 'convenience' sampling method from three health facilities (public, semi-public and private) within Zone 6 of the Kingston and St. Andrew Health Department.

The results revealed that the primary health care facilities were mainly used by low to middle income consumers. The three main factors which were identified as influencing consumers choice of health facility were cost, accessibility and quality of service. Majority (96.3 per cent) of consumers had some knowledge of the range of services available at the respective health facilities.

A number of 'price' and 'non-price' factors impacted upon the consumers satisfaction and utilisation pattern of the health facilities. Approximately three-quarter of the consumers live within the zero to five miles radius of the health facilities and the preferred mode of travel to access these services were by walking or taking the bus. Majority of consumers felt that the fees charged were affordable and that they should pay for health care. Most of the drugs prescribed were available at the pharmacies located at the health facilities.

All three health facilities operated an flexible appointment system which in most cases was ignored, as they choose to operate on a first come first serve basis. Waiting time to see the doctor ranged from half hour to more than two hours. Majority of consumers found the hours of business convenient.

On an average consumers were satisfied with the level of interpersonal skills exhibited by health professionals.

There were no leaflets available at the Community Health Centre and the Foundation for International Self Help (FISH) Development Medical Clinic for consumer education, however all three facilities displayed adequate number of posters. Most consumers appeared to be satisfied with the treatment received. The health facilities were in need of general maintenance and upkeep as the facilities have deteriorated throughout the years due to neglect.

Consumers identified the following as some of the issues that once addressed would improve their level of satisfaction with the services provided:

- Need to employ more full time doctors and pharmacists.

- Waiting area needs to be expanded.
- Need to improve communication process between health care workers and consumers.

Despite these inefficiencies and shortcomings identified with the service, majority of consumers (90.4 per cent) said they would recommend these health facilities to others.

Consumers surveys can play a major role in reorganising services ensuring that the objectives of both the consumer and provider are achieved in a mutually beneficial manner.