

POSTER ABSTRACTS
8th Annual HMO Research Network Conference
April 9-10, 2002 Long Beach, CA

Evaluating Care Delivery
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Patient Expectations and Satisfaction

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Background: Patients' expectations for medical care may influence subsequent outcomes including visit satisfaction. We investigated the association between patient pre-visit expectations and post-visit satisfaction within a large health maintenance organization.

Methods: Using a convenience sample of adult clinic patients of 12 primary care providers (PCP), we evaluated patients' pre-visit levels of expectation for a specialist referral, medical test, medication prescription, diagnosis, symptom improvement, and health discussion. We classified responses of "very important," or "important," as high expectations. After the visit, subjects reported the level to which each pre-visit expectation was fulfilled, and their satisfaction with the visit. We evaluated the association between each expectation and satisfaction.

Results: The 219 subjects had a mean age of 51 years, and tended to be female (69%), white (84%), have less than a college degree (77%), and to have had a previous visit with the PCP (78%). In addition, 35% of subjects reported having "excellent" or "very good" health status. Most patients (96%) expressed having at least one high expectation for the visit: the most common expectation was for a health discussion (82%), followed by a desire for a diagnosis (74%), an improvement in symptoms (64%), receiving a test (42%), a prescription (41%), or a referral to a specialist (34%). The post-visit "excellent" or "very good" fulfillment ratings among subjects with a high expectation ranged from 52% for specialist referral to 78% for health discussion. Most patients (87%) rated their visit satisfaction to be "excellent" or "very good." There were no statistically significant associations between any pre-visit expectation and the post-visit satisfaction.

Conclusions: Patients most frequently expressed high visit expectations for a discussion of their health, a diagnosis, and an improvement in symptoms. These preliminary analyses suggest that overall visit satisfaction was independent of type and magnitude of the pre-visit expectation. Future analyses will explore the association between post-visit perception of expectations fulfillment and satisfaction, and delineate the intra-visit factors modulating patient visit perceptions.