

MEDICAL CARE — PUBLIC OPINIONS AND MANAGEMENT

N. Feschieva, Ts. Kondova

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The medical care presents a product of the activity of the health service and is used by a determined population group. This commitment of a concrete health office (subject of activity) with the population attended (object of activity) involves a feed-back between them, i. e. an information about the degree of satisfaction of the population concerning rendered medical help. Essentially, this information presents public opinions of public health. Its evaluation is of importance not only in theoretical aspects as cognition for public health system itself but also in purely practical aspects as one of the mechanisms for its improvement. In both directions its role is necessary and it can be realized at any level of public health.

In the midst of serious investigations of public opinions of medical care those which discuss large territories (states, regions) predominate in the literature available (3, 4, 6). Recently, it became a common practice in Bulgaria that single medical institutions performed express consultations to the population served by themselves. These inquiries did not reveal the relation with the research in this field clearly enough (1, 2). According to us, their isolation reduces their information value and effectivity for public health management. There are no longitudinal studies of public opinions of medical care although the idea for their current investigation is theoretically well-founded and in a sense popularized among public health leaders (1, 3, 5).

Material and methods

The necessity of studying the public opinion of medical care was a stimulus for the performing of a series of sociological investigations in this respect among the inhabitants of Varna district. Our experience for the period from 1974 till 1981 gives us reason for some general conclusions.

Results and discussion

Firstly, it can be concluded that a functional classification of research of this kind should be elaborated. The investigations could be divided into two main levels — a basic and a superstructural (derivative) one.

To the first, basic level belonging investigations are namely these which reveal on a large scale the factors influencing upon satisfaction of medical care. Their character is sociologic because they include regular relations of public health with other basic social spheres. First, their importance is theoretical and second they could successfully serve the goals of management by showing the tendencies in the development of the interrelations "medical service — population". By this way they enrich the strategy of the medical service at the macrolevel.

The second level includes research whose subject-matter is prompted by the results of basic research. The revealing of the factors possessing the strongest influence on satisfaction of medical help allows to plan research focused directly on them. On this basis the public evaluation of different population groups can be studied. Concerning their character latter research is predominantly organizational-managemental although it contains certain sociological elements. According to their importance the investigations of local and concrete public health institutions make management optimization rather possible tending to the enrichment of the tactics of the medical service at both regional and macrolevel.

The second main generalization is related to the conditions warranting the possibility for use of the data from the studies of public opinions as a collective in public health institutions' practice. In our opinion they are determined by:

- a) presence of reliability by using of correct methodical approaches;
- b) commitment of programme, resp. inquiry with concrete problems of organization of the institution;
- c) providing of data periodicity and comparability;
- d) last but not least — education of public health managers in the field of sociology including teaching them in application of sociological investigations in management.

These main conclusions were a starting point in the system elaborated by us for studying public opinions of the activity of ambulance and polyclinic public health institutions in the district of Varna. The aim of the system is to create an information basis resulting in optimization of medical care management based on investigations of the degree of satisfaction of the population of Varna district concerning ambulance and polyclinic medical help and of the factors which determine it.

We used the results from the studies at the basic level in elaboration of the programme, resp. inquiry for investigation of the public evaluation. A scale of correlation relations was compiled that showed that the general satisfaction of ambulance medical care possessed a strong correlation with the following factors: organization of patient's reception in the polyclinics ($p=0,8$); physician's activity in diagnostic-therapeutic process of the patients ($p=0,7$); behavioural interrelations between medical staff and patients ($p=0,6$); social-demographic characteristics of the patients ($p=0,5$). In this way groups of questions possessing highest information value were determined and an inquiry with 21 closed questions was compiled. Ten questions were with range-scaled responses.

The direct anonymous inquiry was considered the most appropriate registration method. The number of patient's examinations during the preceding year was used as a basis for forming the representative extracts according to single public health institutions. The inquiry was performed fourfold bimonthly for each trimester of calendar year to ensure to an unintentional selection of inquired persons and seasonality of observation. All the patients required ambulance medical help at every full hour were included in the study.

The comparability of the results is assured at two levels — in the public health institution (between single consulting rooms) and at district level (between single institutions as well as between consulting rooms of the same kind in the whole district (i. g. therapeutic, pediatric ones etc.). For that purpose mean ratings of any range-scaled responses are transformed into so-called "normalized rating" calculated according to the formula:

$$NC_i = \frac{C_i}{\max B_{ij}}, \text{ where } .$$

C_j is mean rating of responses to i -question, $\max B_{ij}$ is the maximal rating j of the responses of i -question. The normalized rating changes in the range of the interval from 0 till 1 and its higher value characterizes a more favourable state of the phenomenon studied. A coefficient of significance of the single questions is used to form the lump normalized ratings of the quality of ambulance reception according to consulting rooms and public health institutions. The latter is the result of expert evaluations in 3 districts. The normalized ratings contribute to commensurability between the single links and present a precondition for applying of an impartial assessment criteria.

Because of the large amount of information an electronic data processing is suggested. It allows to look for more complicated statistical correlations and to reveal some regularities and tendencies within the interrelations "medical service — population". The high scientific-technical level has a favourable influence upon quality and kind of the initial information. The clearness of the initial tables allows their quick apprehension by the user and enhances their effectivity in management. This effectivity depends also on the correct dissemination of the initial information into different management levels. It increases when the principle is adhered to: each level has to receive information to which it has the corresponding management competency to respond.

A conclusion can be drawn that multifactorial dependence of public opinions of medical care involves the building of a system for its periodic examination. Based on a complex approach including sociological, technical and organizational-management elements this system creates an information basis for perfecting the tactics and strategy of health service management as a whole and of its departments.

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ЗДРАВООХРАНЕНИЕ — ОБЩЕСТВЕННОЕ МНЕНИЕ И УПРАВЛЕНИЕ

Н. Фещиева, Ц. Кондова

РЕЗЮМЕ

В работе сделан обзор проведенных исследований общественного мнения по вопросам здравоохранения. Приводятся основные характеристики составленной авторами системы в целях периодического исследования общественного мнения по вопросам амбулаторного и поликлинического обслуживания.