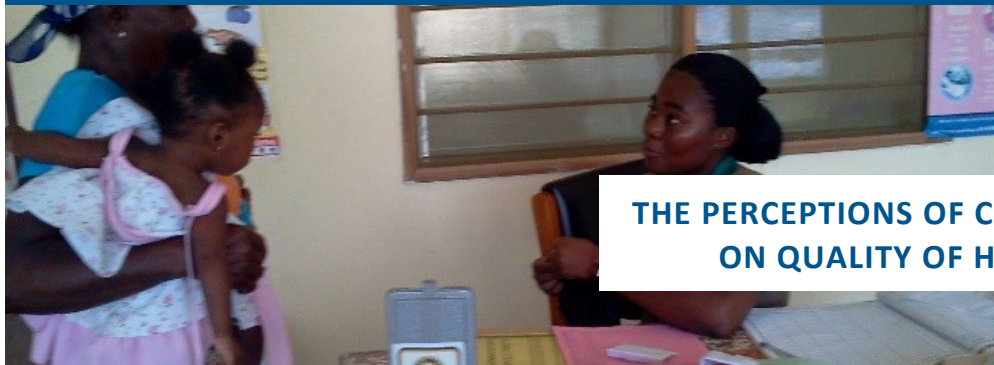


LEARNING & ANALYSIS BRIEF



THE PERCEPTIONS OF CLIENTS AND HEALTH PERSONNEL ON QUALITY OF HEALTHCARE DELIVERY IN GHANA



KEY COUNTRY FACTS

27.4 M population

37% population covered by National Health Insurance Scheme (2016)

3728 health facilities accredited by National Health Insurance Authority (2009-2013)

35% active SafeCare clinics



Data according to World Bank and PharmAccess (2016)

This brief compares the perceptions of clients and health workers on the quality of services in NHIS accredited health facilities in Ghana. It is a summary of a study that found wide gaps in the perceptions of clients and health workers on healthcare quality. While health staff generally perceived health service quality to be satisfactory from the technical quality dimension, clients largely expressed disappointment in the quality of health services. The brief illustrates that that client trust in Ghana's healthcare and insurance system could be improved if the non-technical and technical aspects of healthcare are given equal attention

Background

Poor quality of healthcare services in health facilities is a major reason why many countries in Africa, including Ghana, are not able to meet the health needs of their citizens. Over the years, health authorities have paid greater attention to the medical technical aspect of health service delivery than patients' needs and experiences. This phenomenon has gradually reduced clients' patronage of healthcare and insurance services in Ghana.

Even though a national health insurance scheme was introduced in Ghana over a decade ago, nearly 60% of people are still not registered in the scheme. A contributing factor being the perceived poor quality of health and insurance services.

Many scientific studies on quality care in Ghana either investigate quality healthcare solely from the technical medical or client-perceived perspectives without comparing the two dimensions, particularly in the context of accredited health facilities. While acknowledging the importance of client-perceived quality healthcare in quality improvement plans¹⁻³, it is important to recognize that mainly relying on this quality dimension might not adequately define the whole concept of quality healthcare and should not be used alone as proxy for overall quality, safety and effectiveness of a healthcare system. Likewise, relying mainly on technical quality assessment outcomes without taking into account the experiences and views of clients might not enhance quality from the perspective of clients which is needed to increase health service utilization and health insurance uptake and coverage.

In this context, empirical evidence of low patient satisfaction with health service quality coupled with minimal gains in health outcome indicators has put healthcare quality at the

debate on the quality of Ghana's healthcare system. Understanding views of clients and health providers on quality care and comparing these views with the technical quality care situation in the particular health facilities will offer policy makers and health managers the opportunity to address existing gaps in the service delivery process and promote client trust in the healthcare system and the NHIS.

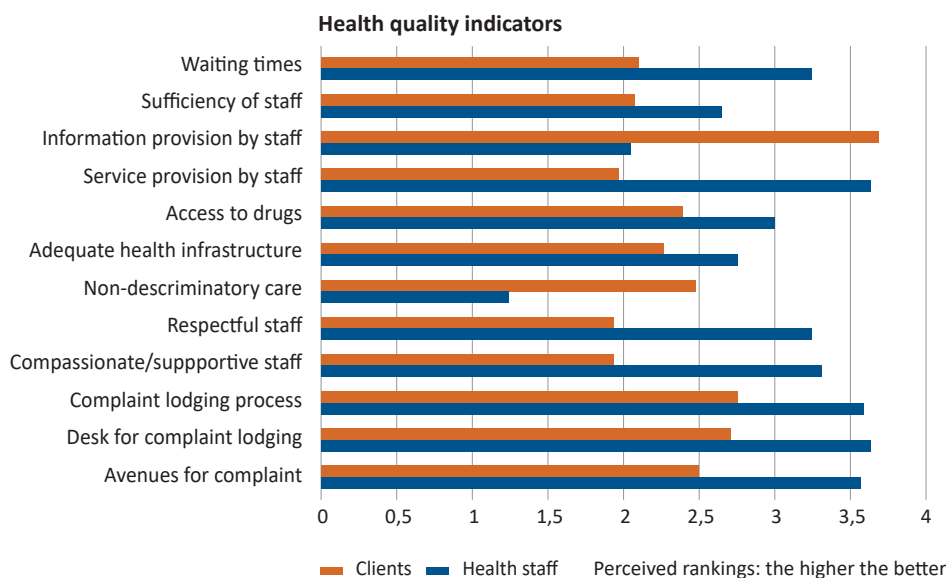
This study sought to ascertain the perceptions of clients and health staff on quality healthcare services in accredited primary health facilities and how these perceptions correlate with patient safety and risk status (technical quality) in these facilities. The hypothesis is that paying attention to different aspects of healthcare quality can provide

more effective quality improvement options for the health sector in Ghana and throughout Africa.

Approach to Research Study

The baseline study design included household and health facility level surveys conducted in

Figure 1 Comparison of health staff and client perceptions of health service quality. Source: Alhassan et al, 2015 (derived from Table 2, pp. 10). PLOS ONE | DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0140109.



two coastal regions in Ghana including 64 NHIS-accredited clinics/health centres, 1903 households and 324 frontline health workers. Data was collected between March and June 2012.

Three main instruments were used for the primary data collection, namely the SafeCare Essentials tool to “measure” technical quality of care, a health facility staff questionnaire to ascertain staff perceptions of quality, and a household questionnaire to determine client perceptions of the quality of health care. The SafeCare Essentials tool used to assess patient safety and risk reduction efforts in the selected facilities is provided by the SafeCare Initiative, a collaboration of the PharmAccess Foundation, the Council for Health Services Accreditation of Southern Africa (COHSA-SA), and the Joint Commission International (JCI). The tool is designed to identify the capability of a facility to move slowly or more rapidly towards higher levels of clinical quality and safer patient care according to staff efforts.¹

The household and health facility staff questionnaires explored respondents’ socio-demographic characteristics, employment status of household heads, professional category, insurance enrolment status and perceptions on quality of healthcare services in the nearest NHIS-accredited health facility.

Findings

The study found that clients’ views of health service quality are largely different from those of health workers and other “technical” measures of service quality. Overall, health staff perceived many of the quality care indicators to be satisfactory, contrary to the perceptions of clients (See Fig. 1). The gaps between staff-client perceptions were observed in the areas of:

- Satisfaction with health service provision by health workers
- Information provision to clients by health staff
- Compassion and support of the health staff
- The health staff being respectful
- Waiting time at the health facility

The differences in perceptions of clients and staff could be attributed to a number of factors which include respondents’ understanding of the healthcare quality issues at stake. The relatively higher satisfaction ratings by health staff on many of the quality healthcare proxies could be attributed to tendency of health staff to give more favorable answers to portray “a good name” for their facilities or perhaps health staff were complacent of their efforts towards quality service delivery.

Unbalanced commitments towards technical and perceived quality care improvement could be another reason for the negative association between technical and client-perceived quality care dimensions. Healthcare facilities which do not recognize clients have concerns with human relations of staff could lead them to perpetually render services that do not satisfy clients’ needs even though adherence to professional practices (technical quality) might be adequate.

Conclusion

Based on the SafeCare Essentials assessment carried out in the sampled NHIS-accredited health facilities, clients’ perception on the quality of healthcare was noted to be low while the health staff perceived the quality of care to be good. These differences are indicative of a possible communication gap and information asymmetry between clients and service providers. By prioritizing the needs of clients when it comes to service delivery, balancing the medical technical aspect of

quality with the perceptions of clients can ensure that the clients’ trust in the healthcare and health insurance system is enhanced.

TAKE HOME MESSAGES

- The perceptions of health workers and clients vary when it comes to quality healthcare services but this can be based on the difference in understanding and interpretation of the healthcare process
- Clients’ judgement of service quality is largely informed by interpersonal and human relational aspects of care which healthcare professionals are often tempted to neglect.
- Logistics and human resource are usually cited as major constraints in meeting the demands or needs of clients in resource-poor settings in Africa.
- Promoting a healthcare system that equally emphasizes perceived and technical quality in Ghana would enhance clients’ confidence and trust in the National Health Insurance Scheme and subsequently encourage (re)enrolment in the NHIS and promote efforts towards attaining Universal Health Coverage for the people of Ghana.

Lessons learned

- **Increased commitment to medical “technical” quality alone will not necessarily improve client satisfaction and utilization of healthcare services.**
- **Healthcare providers need to intensify efforts on client education to bridge possible information asymmetry between health workers and clients.**
- **A more holistic approach to healthcare quality improvement will help enhance client confidence in Ghana’s healthcare system and the National Health Insurance Scheme.**

- 1 Boller C, Wyss K, Mtisiwa D and Tanner M. Quality and comparison of antenatal care in public and private providers in the United Republic of Tanzania, Bulletin of the World Health Organization. 2003; 81(2).
- 2 Walker D, Muyinda H, Foster S, Kengeya-Kayondo J and Whitworth J. The quality of care by private practitioners for sexually transmitted diseases in Uganda, Health Policy and Planning. 2001; 16: 35–40. pmid:11238428
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- 4 SafeCare Initiative. PharmAccess Foundation. SafeCare Essentials: This rapid assessment tool identifies five primary risk areas related to quality and safety, Amsterdam. Netherlands, 2015.
Available: <http://www.safe-care.org/SafeCareEssentials>

ARTICLE TITLE & AUTHORS

Comparison of perceived and technical healthcare quality in primary health facilities: Implications for a sustainable National Health Insurance Scheme in Ghana

Robert Kaba Alhassan, Nicole Spieker, Tobias F. Rinke de Wit - PharmAccess | Edward Nketiah-Amponsah, Danile Kojo Arhinful-Noguchi - University of Ghana, Legon | Wendy Janssens - AIGH | Stephen Opoku Duku - Noguchi-University of Ghana, Legon | Menno Pradhan - Vrije University Amsterdam

AFFILIATIONS

PharmAccess Foundation

For more information contact: arkabason@gmail.com



Contact info@pharmaccess.org | www.pharmaccess.org

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