

# Patient Satisfaction in Primary Health Care



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# Are our patients satisfied?

*“Yesterday I needed treatment because I couldn’t swallow with a bad sore throat and my GP wasn’t available and I was disgusted. I told the doctor I had bad sore throat, he got a normal torch and saw my throat, wrote antibiotics and I was out without any checkups in 20 seconds after 2 hours wait”*

# Are our patients satisfied?

*“Sometimes I really am disgusted by the behaviour of medics and paramedics towards patients in waiting rooms, as if they are invisible. The behaviour of some staff in some health centres should be questioned”*

# Are our patients satisfied?

*“When it comes to health centres much has to be done. I went to a clinic suffering abdominal pains one night. I waited 15 minutes for the so called doctor to wake up. He came down and sat on a chair in the corridor and I stood up!!!! He made a wrong diagnosis verbally because he never palpated me or did a check up and sent me to Mater Dei Hospital. Very, very unprofessional”*

# Patient Satisfaction

- Increasingly important in evaluating quality of health care (Williams and Calnan, 1991)
- Depends mainly on the quality of the doctor-patient relationship and good communication skills
- Higher in the private sector in Malta (Asciak et al., 2003)

# Research Questions

- Which factors are associated with patient satisfaction in primary health care?
- Is there a difference in patient satisfaction between public and private sectors of primary health care?
- Is the level of patient satisfaction achieved from a consultation perceived differently by patients and doctors?

# Aims

- To identify the characteristics of a family doctor most likely to lead to patient satisfaction
- To compare and contrast characteristics of family doctors in public and private sectors of primary health care
- To compare patient satisfaction between public and private sectors of primary health care



# Objectives

To identify:

- the perceptions of patients in the **government health centres** of their doctors' personality traits, professional values, duties and responsibilities, communication skills, and clinical care
- the perceptions of patients in the **private primary health care sector** of their family doctors' personality traits, professional values, duties and responsibilities, communication skills, and clinical care
- the perceptions of patients in **both public and private sectors** of primary health care on the most important characteristics of a family doctor that lead to patient satisfaction



# Objectives

- To **compare** patient satisfaction between public and private sectors of primary health care
- To **identify** the perceptions of family doctors as regards critical factors in their practice associated with patient satisfaction
- To **provide feedback** on the results of the study to doctors in various sectors of primary health care

# Research Setting

- Malta is a small island with an estimated population of 410,290 (*National Statistics Office, 2008*)
- Two-thirds of primary care provided by private sector
- Public sector consists of 9 regional health centres and 47 district clinics
- 24-hour comprehensive health care services free at point of delivery

# Primary Health Care

- Patients' first contact with health care system
- Hub from which patients are guided through the health system (The World Health Report, 2008)
- Place where relationships between doctors and patients develop
- Health promotion and disease prevention
- Basis consists of good doctor-patient relationships and continuity of care (Azzopardi & Dixon, 1999)

# Factors Affecting Patient Satisfaction

- Good doctor-patient relationship
- Being empathic; giving the patient time and attention
- Honesty, trustworthiness, able to keep confidentiality
- Meeting the patients' desires and expectations; congruence between doctor's and patient's perceptions of the consultation

# Factors Affecting Patient Satisfaction

- Easy accessibility
- Good communication
- Good clinical care; giving an explanation of the symptoms
- Continuity of care
- Quality of medical facilities

# Primary Health Care in Malta

- 1996 – public sector - 60% claim it was ‘very good’ and 34.5% claim that it was ‘good’ (Azzopardi & Dixon, 1999)
- 2002 - higher in the private sector (96.1%) than in the public sector (83.1%) (Asciak et al. , 2003)
- Trend shows deterioration in quality of care in public sector - why?

# Methodology

- 4 health centres in representative areas of the island
- 4 private clinics in the same areas as the health centres
- 30 patients in each clinic, aged 30-70years – 240 patients in total
- Patient questionnaires distributed in each clinic
- Interviews with doctors from each clinic



# Data Collection Tool

- Adapted from questionnaire by Murray Lough (2006)
- Measures what factors are important for patient satisfaction
- 7 sections, 32 questions, Likert scale 1-5, English and Maltese versions
- Asks about doctor's personality traits, professional values, duties and responsibilities, communication skills, clinical care
- Final section asks about patient satisfaction

# Semi-structured Interviews

- Carried out on one doctor from each clinic
- Ask about doctors' perceptions of patient satisfaction and doctor satisfaction
- Discuss same subjects as those in the questionnaire



# Limitations

- Convenience sampling vs random sampling
- Different methods of data collection in public and private sectors
- Doctors interviewed at health centres assumed to represent other doctors



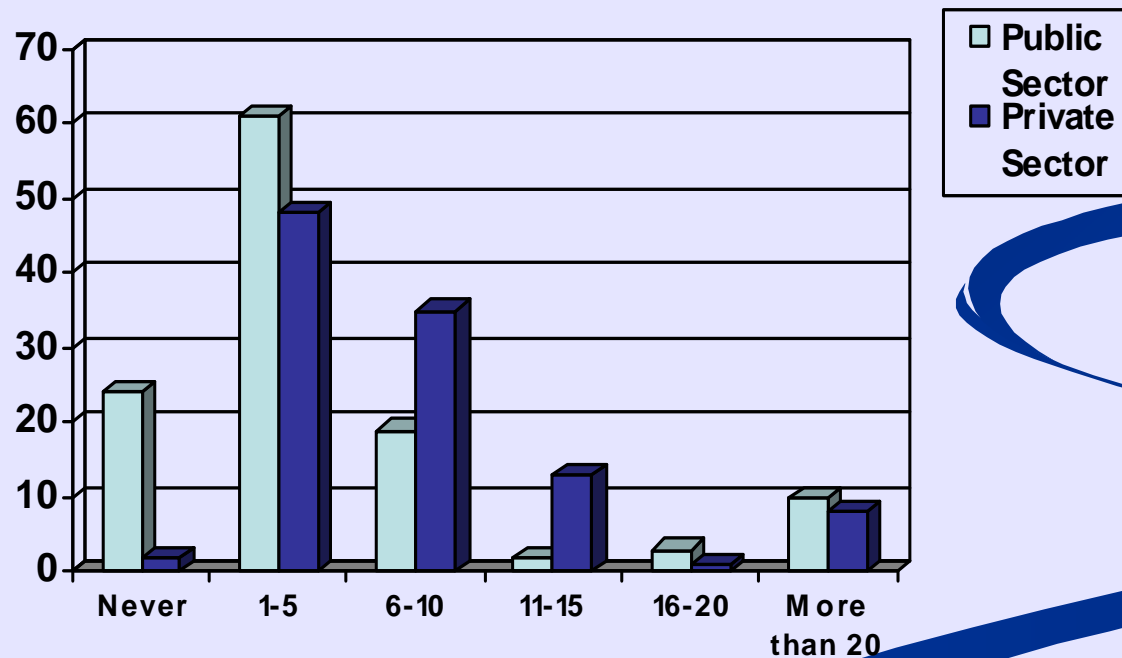
# Results

- 94% response rate (226 out of 240 questionnaires returned)
- 100 male, 126 female respondents
- Higher response rate in public sector
- No significant age or gender difference between public and private sectors
- 85% of public sector respondents have a private family doctor



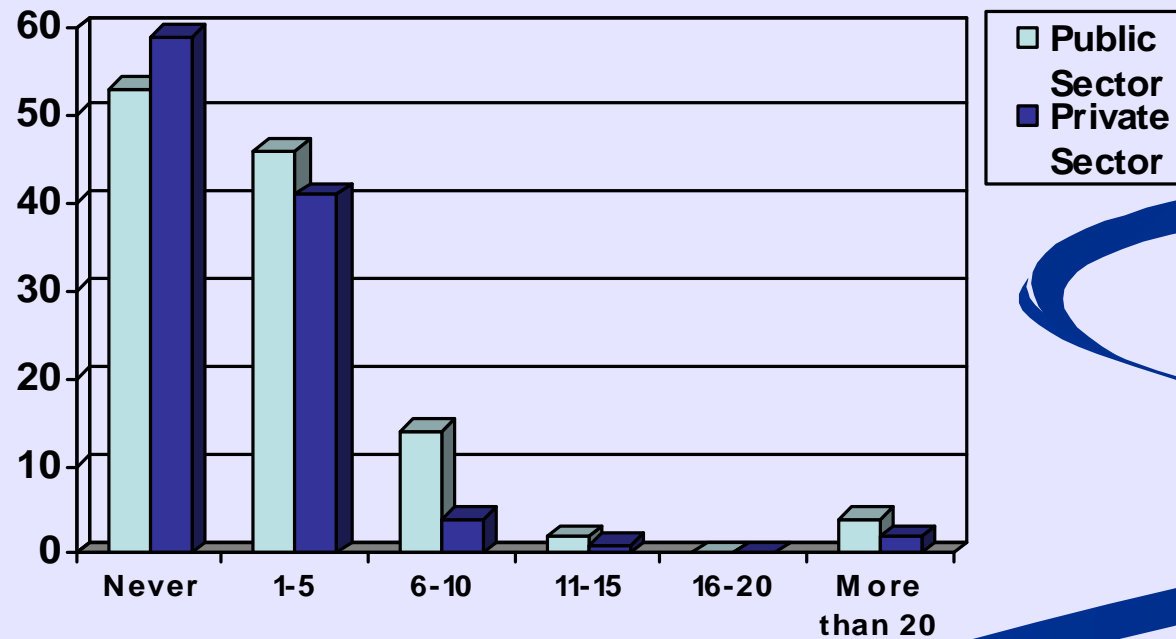
# Results

- How many times have you seen your doctor in the last year?



# Results

- How many times have you seen another doctor in the last year?



# Factors most likely to lead to patient satisfaction

- Being ready to explain what is wrong before giving treatment
- Being up to date with recent developments in the profession
- The ability to make the right diagnosis
- Being enthusiastic
- Having a nice attitude with patients
- Being honest and trustworthy



# Scale means most likely to lead to patient satisfaction

- Communication skills
- Clinical care

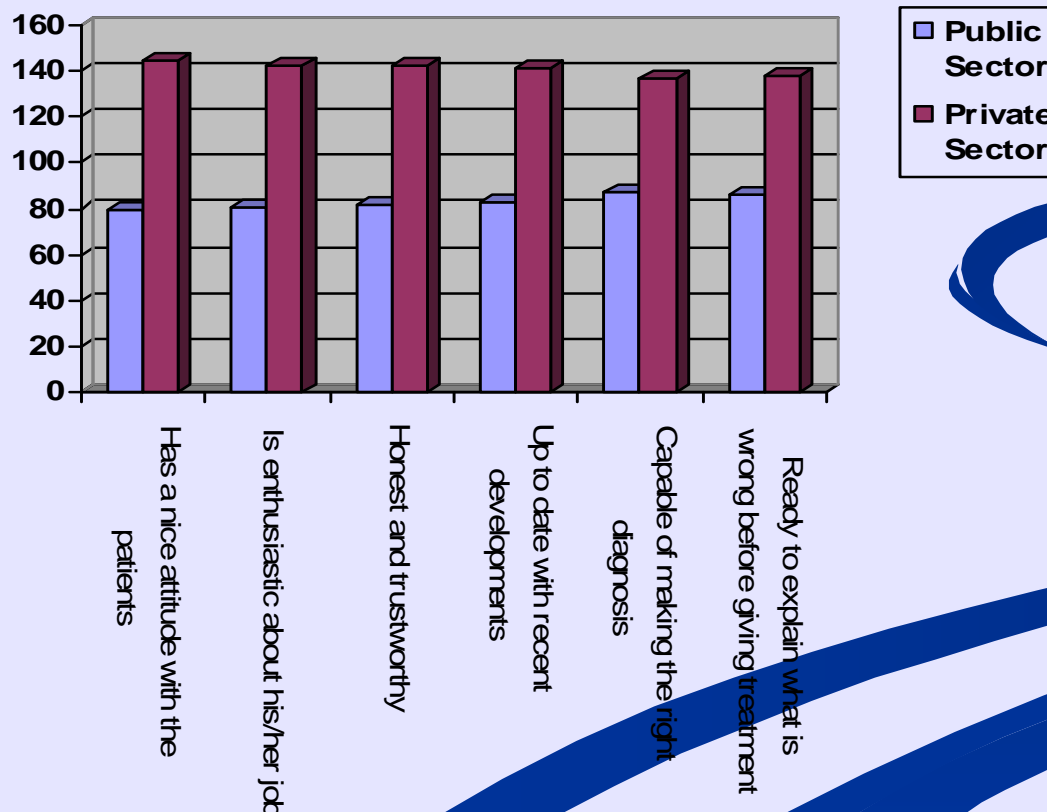


# Comparison of patient satisfaction between public and private sectors

- 75.7% in public sector are satisfied with the service that the doctor provides
- 98.2% of private sector respondents are satisfied
- 78.2% of patients believe that the doctor at the health centre is a good family doctor
- 99.1% of patients believe that their private family doctor is a good family doctor
- Difference in patient satisfaction between public and private sectors is highly significant ( $p < 0.001$ )

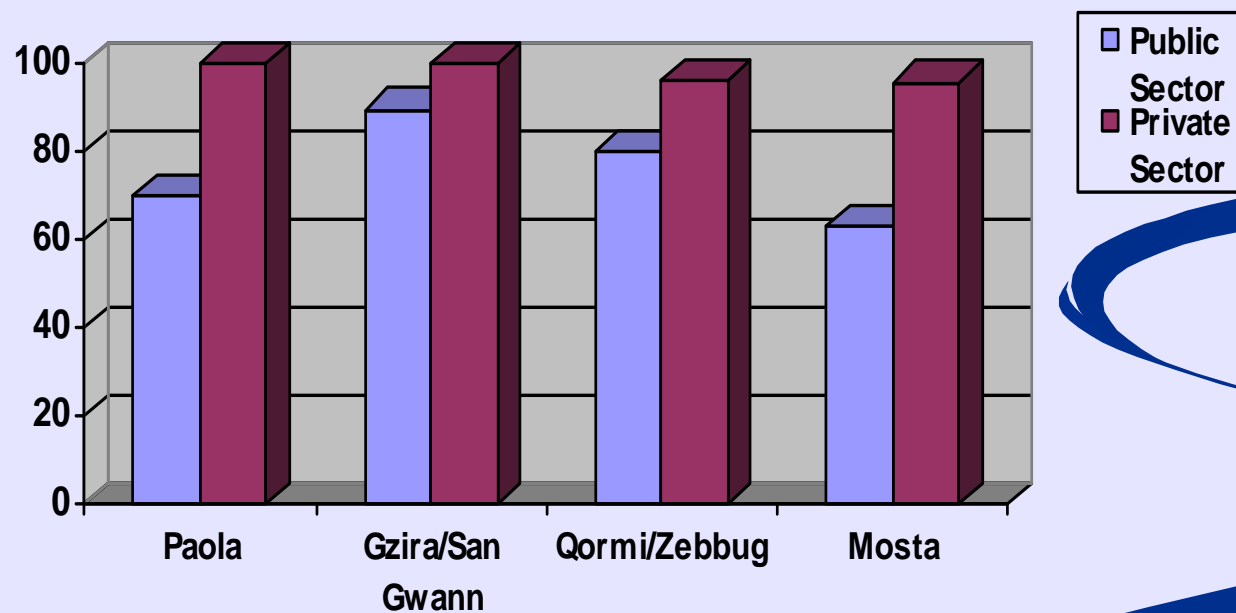
# Comparison of public and private sectors

Factors most likely to lead to patient satisfaction



# Comparison of public and private sectors

Patient satisfaction in different areas of Malta



# Comparison of scale means between public and private sectors

- Difference between public and private sectors is statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) for all the five dimensions
- Largest difference between the means in public and private sectors is for communication skills

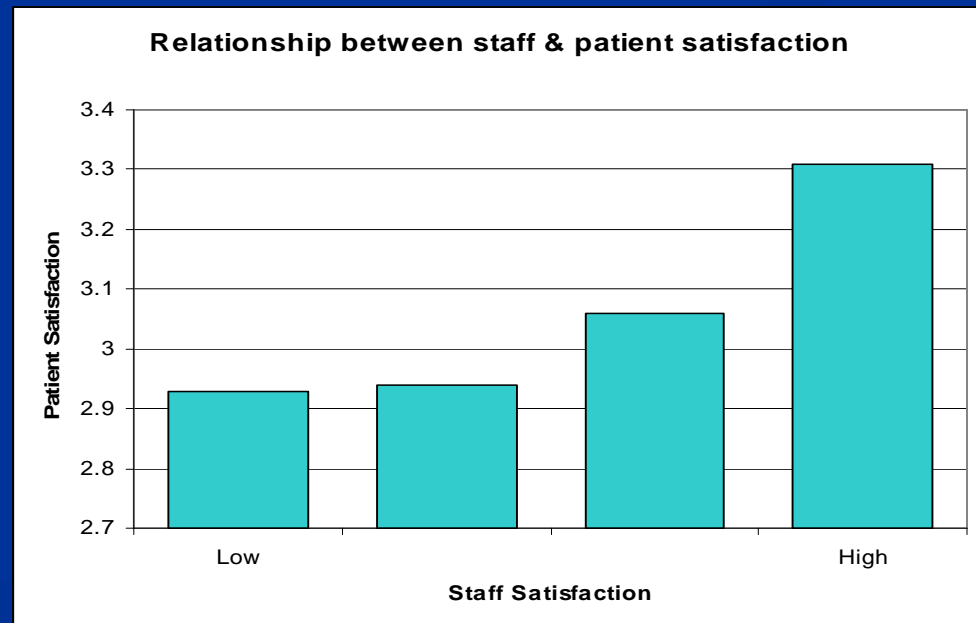


# Doctors' perceptions of patient satisfaction

- Semi-structured interviews carried out on doctors working in the clinics
- In the public sector, doctors spend much less time with the patient than in the private sector
- Limited time explains difference in communication skills between sectors
- Poor perception of patient satisfaction in the public sector

# Doctor Satisfaction

- Depends on good doctor-patient relationships and continuity of care
- Very low in public sector, high in private sector
- Affects level of patient satisfaction achieved



Borrill et al. (2001)



# Discussion

- Communication skills and clinical care most important to achieve patient satisfaction
- Good doctor-patient relationships and continuity of care are necessary for doctor and patient satisfaction
- There is a statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.001$ ) in patient satisfaction between public and private sectors of primary health care

# Discussion

- The difference in patient satisfaction between public and private sectors is mainly due to poor communication skills in the public sector
- This is the result of an increasing shortage of doctors, high workload and limited time for the patient in the public sector
- Doctors in the public sector are dissatisfied with their positions and have poor perceptions of patient satisfaction

# Barriers to improvement of the public sector

- Adequacy of resources
- Shortage of doctors
- Public-private split
- Lack of staff motivation
- Abuse of the primary health care system



# Recommendations



- Patient registration
- Better working conditions for doctors
- Control over abuse of resources
- Increasing access to investigations from the private sector
- Computerization of patient records
- Increase motivation for doctors
- Monitoring of patient satisfaction





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