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Waris Qidwai

Aga Khan University, waris.qidwai@aku.edu

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ACCESSIBILITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

Waris Qidwai

Access to healthcare services is a major concern among health professionals committed to providing services to their patients. It is because the access to healthcare has a major impact on morbidity and mortality.¹ It has also been shown that lack of access to healthcare leads to dissatisfaction among the patients.² The issue has assumed significance to the extent that calls are being made to take care of the patients outside the clinics.³

The issue closely related is that of limiting patient access by prioritizing patient needs versus open access to services for all patients. An open access policy for patients has been tried with variable degree of success with help from the nursing services.

Effectiveness of the alternate medicine healthcare providers has been questioned.⁴ It has also been reported that allopathic practitioners are conceived to be more effective than the indigenous healers.⁵ On the contrary, alternate care providers are reported to have been preferred for treatment by asthma patients.⁶ It has been shown that the issue of access to healthcare is given more priority by the patients than their physicians.⁷

details on the questionnaires. The participating patient signed a consent form provided before hand, after assurance that confidentiality will be maintained.

The survey included 387 patients. The majority were married women with a mean age of 32.6 years. The respondent's perceived accessibility and effectiveness of healthcare providers is tabulated below.

The study population belonged to the educated class with a good socioeconomic standing. It was a limitation of the study but one can argue that since the patients from all walks of life visit the study facility, it offered a more homogenous population for any study. A study on similar grounds will be worth carrying out in the community.

Another limitation of the study was that patients were interviewed while visiting an allopathic facility, thereby exhibiting preference for them.

It is no surprise that allopathic system of healthcare was not only considered to be the most accessible but also most effective. Interesting finding was that complimentary healthcare providers were also considered to be accessible, but not equally effective. This was important because the effectiveness of the complimentary healthcare providers was questioned.

There have been reports of improved access to healthcare with the help of nurses. Since we have a shortage of trained nurses in the country, such an opportunity does not exist at the moment.

It was interesting to note that Homeopath practitioners were

		Healthcare provider				
		Allopath	Homeopath	Hakim	Spiritual healer	
Accessibility rank order (1 = minimum, 5 = maximum)	1	No (%)	-	06 (1.68)	23 (5.9)	21 (5.4)
	2	No (%)	-	38 (9.8)	37 (9.6)	53 (13.7)
	3	No (%)	11 (2.8)	190 (49.1)	191 (49.4)	174 (45)
	4	No (%)	129 (33.3)	109 (28.2)	122 (31.5)	123 (31.8)
	5	No (%)	247 (63.8)	44 (11.4)	14 (3.6)	16 (4.1)
Effectiveness rank order (1 = minimum, 5 = maximum)	1	No (%)	-	36 (9.3)	106 (27.4)	257 (66.4)
	2	No (%)	0.4 (0.1)	139 (35.9)	198 (51.2)	64 (16.5)
	3	No (%)	14 (3.6)	121 (31.3)	53 (13.7)	42 (10.9)
	4	No (%)	150 (38.8)	76 (19.6)	28 (7.2)	18 (4.7)
	5	No (%)	219 (56.6)	15 (3.9)	02 (0.5)	06 (1.6)

We, therefore, established a need to study the accessibility and effectiveness of healthcare providers, among our patients.

A questionnaire-based cross sectional survey was conducted at the Family Practice Center, The Aga Khan University, Karachi from March to June 2001.

Patients were asked to rank the accessibility and effectiveness of Allopathic doctors, Hakim, Homeopathic practitioners and spiritual healers. "One" was considered the minimum score while "five" was regarded as the maximum. The questionnaire included details about the demographic profile of the patients. The patients selected by convenience sampling, filled out the

Department of Family Medicine, The Aga Khan Hospital, Karachi.

Correspondence: Dr. Waris Qidwai, Assoc. Prof, The Aga Khan University, Stadium Road, P.O. Box: 3500, Karachi. E-mail: waris@akunet.org

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considered to be more accessible and effective than Hakim practitioners. Spiritual healers ranked the lowest in terms of accessibility and effectiveness in our survey.

There have been calls for identifying need, mobilizing resources, and finding solutions with regard to the access to healthcare. The results of our study strongly supported such a recommendation.

There is a need for open access to healthcare but perhaps an equally important issue is that of equity of access for our patients. The results of our study strongly supported such a recommendation.

We have documented patients' views on access and effectiveness of healthcare providers and we strongly recommend further studies and debate on these issues.

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