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THE FACTORS WHICH HAVE AN IMPACT ON PATIENTS WHEN THEY ARE CHOOSING HEALTH CARE CENTRES IN POLAND

In the article, factors, which have an impact on patients when they are choosing services in health care sector, are presented. The kinds of needs and the characteristic features of medical services which influence directly on patients are shown in the paper. The research highlight also the aspect which is the most visible in the Polish health care system (it is common not only in Poland but in some European countries as well) – the time of waiting for the appointments, mainly with specialists. It is methodological and research article.

Keywords: needs, health care services, patients, patients's service, time of waiting for doctor appointment.

Introduction. Polish economy is competing one and in this kind of economy it is useful to use the rules of marketing. The sector of health care is becoming more and more competing. It refers not only to the private health care system but to the public one too. The using of rules of marketing in the sector of health care is becoming more and more justified. The goal of the article is the presentation of factors influencing the patients when they are choosing some services in the health care sector in Poland.

Analysis of the recent research and publications. These factors are detailed in the conducted survey research. In the case of marketing the main element of all actions is a customer. In the area of health care and medical services the customer is a patient. This situation is special in two ways. It concerns firstly the importance of actions connected with the patient and secondly the specificity of health care system, health insurances, free medical public services. The similar subject-matter take up by: A. Bukowska-Piestrzyńska [1], M. Dobska and P. Dobski [2], Ph. Kotler, J. Shalowitz, Robert J. Stevens [7], M. Kautsch, M. Whitfield, J. Klich [11] and others.

The aim of the article is the presentation of factors which have an impact on patients when they are choosing services in health care sector.

Main material. When we use the rules of marketing, we should remember that the motivator of any customer / patient actions is the lack of fulfilling, so the feeling of need and next its identification. Taking under consideration the social and economical function we can distinguish four classes of goods, which influence the level of customer need fulfilling. This classification is presented by Ph. Kotler [4, p. 31]. He analyses the needs which fulfilling: a) makes the customer immediately satisfied with used product; b) gives effects in longer time. The first group are so called desirable products, which influence the high level of customer satisfaction both in short and long time. The opposite group are deficient products which give low customer satisfaction both current and long lasting. The third group of products are those which give high immediate satisfaction with fulfilled needs, but influence negatively on long-lasting "prosperity" of customer. They are pleasing products. The last fourth group includes

salutary products. They give relatively low satisfaction with current consuming, but influence positively on the human development for a long time [4, p 31-32].

When discussing the needs, we should remember that they have crucial meaning next to earlier experience of patient and / or information concerning the choice of particular health care centre. The basic need which every patient comes with is making physical and mental health condition better. These needs are also accompanied by the additional ones. A. Lawthers presents the most important area of patient's expectations [9, p. 70-71]:

- availability;
- good communication and comprehensible way of informing (according to illness, treatment, etc.);
- respecting his laws and preferences when a doctor chooses the way of treatment, continuation and coordination of the whole therapeutic process (consultation with other doctors, doctor's coordination of process when some parts of treatment are in the other health care centres, etc.);
- psychological comfort – during the examining and the process of treatment;
- adjusting the health care to the personal expectations and needs.

As the most important patients' needs we can recognise the need of [9. p. 70-71]:

– *information* – a patient wants to be informed about what is happening with him or her: what is his or her health condition, how a particular treatment is expected to work. The fulfilling of this need usually makes a patient less scared. The psychological research shows that the knowledge referring to this fact makes the patient less stressed;

– *situation control* – the ways of increasing the situation control are: full information, asking about opinion, agreement, showing the possibility of choice;

– *safety* – we should remember that a patient comes to the health centre with something which is the most valuable, with his or her life and health. That is why, providing the safety is crucial. This need can be satisfied with such information: about health condition and expected effects of particular treatment, doctor's experience. Very important is constant building and maintaining the patient's trust in doctor or given centre. A crucial element which builds the feeling of safety is cleanness, sterility and even the atmosphere between the staff of health centre;

– *interest and emotional support* – the pressing need is necessity of directing more attention to a patient, what does not mean to dedicate longer time, but active listening, smile, addressing to a patient;

– *the respect and acceptance* – a patient in health centres is often forced to exposing and showing their weaknesses that is why, showing them respect, polite attitude of medical staff helps patient maintain a proper personal image;

– *intimacy and confidentiality* – exposing either physical or mental, often results in hindering. If a patient is not provided with intimacy and the feeling of confidentiality, it can make some difficulties and what is worse leave permanent trauma. Caring about these aspects builds the confidence in staff and health centre;

– *friendly atmosphere* – a patient, who is a customer, expects smile, polite and friendly service and should not be dependent on either good or bad staff's mood.

It would be good if the practice in the health centre became the observation of patients' and staff's behaviour which could enable to distinguish appearing needs and possibilities of their fulfilling. It can be done by asking patients according to such questions [8; 10; 11]:

1. What do the patients do after entering the health care centre and in what order?

2. How long do they wait for the appointment?
3. Do they tell anything? What if they do?
4. How do the patients look like when they go out?
5. Do they look satisfied, frustrated, indifferent?
6. Is there something special in their behaviour?
7. Do they declare any doubts, grudges, or recognition?
8. Who do they direct to?
9. What are their the most common questions?
10. Do they get any support?
11. Do the staff react to the comments of patients? How do they react? How fast?
12. Is sometimes a patient nicely surprised?
13. What do they look the most often at?
14. Do they look often at their watches?
15. Are their bored with waiting for an appointment?
16. Do they talk with each other when they wait?
17. What do they talk about?
18. Do they sit, stand or walk?
19. If all waiting patients wanted to sit down, would they have place?
20. Are there any tables and possibility to drink something?
21. Is it possible to eat any good snack?
22. Is there a shop or a small canteen in the health care centre?
23. Is there any phone?
24. Are there any leaflets or information brochure concerning the whole offer of services in given health care centre?
25. Do patients read them or take?

Taking under consideration the above mentioned elements we should remember about the essence of health services. The health services have a lot of specific features which influence marketing actions [5, p. 36]:

1. It is complex in the psychological respect process which takes place in front of patients.
2. They are accompanied by stress.
3. The health service needs to have constant doctor interaction with patient, so the doctor's attitude towards ill person is crucial in the PR policy of health centre.
4. Providing the health services is based on the specialist knowledge. The patients do not know, what complex tool are for, they do not understand the names mentioned by a doctor, that is why it increases the necessity of building the confidence in doctor and centre.
5. When the patients turn themself in to doctors, it means that their needs are understood. Patients expect some explanations, communications. A doctor is expected to serve well and have good communicative skills and concentration on the patient.
6. Doctors sometimes are unable to fully satisfied their patients.
7. Doctors cannot diversify their services. It lets them to impact on patients' perception by means of complicated surgeries.
8. The quality of medical service depends not only on a doctor, but on patient as well.
9. Patients do not estimate the technical quality of a given service.

Analysing the mentioned statements, we can surmise that the expectations of medical services purchasers are determined by their earlier experience, friends' opinions and heard information. The creating of too low level of expectations can make difficulties in encouraging large group of people to buy an offer. Too high level of expectations can make

customers dissatisfied. When companies are concentrated on a customer, their goal of actions and basic success meter is purchaser's satisfaction, but there should be the balance between the satisfaction level and company profitability.

The elements of customer service. In the case of proper actions connected with customer service, the diagram of customer / patient service can be needed. In the health centres such elements are often informal. Formalizing them and working out some procedures and next training in proper direction can be desirable. Thanks to formalization, the process of service can be managed. It enables to identify the elements which make customer service difficult – eliminating them or equalizing “weak points” and improve the elements which make the customer service better. As the most important elements in service we can recognise proper opening hours and the time of waiting for an appointment (Fig. 1).

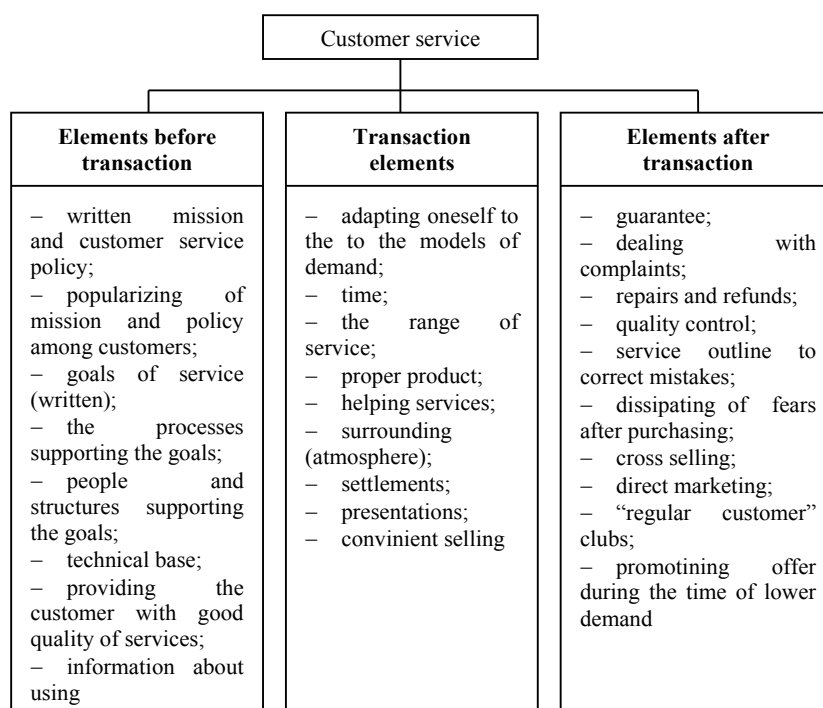


Figure 1 – The elements of customer service [3]

In order to make a serviced customer satisfied a worker should be fully adapted. It is a guarantee of satisfied patient – the purchaser of service and company profits.

The proper staff attitude contacting with customers, it means the liaisons taking part in direct actions of value marketing and moderators taking parts indirectly in these actions, should include- according to the purchasers opinions- some elements [1, p. 23-232]:

- responsibility – involvement and taking care of purchaser's thing, not sending him to another people, not leaving without any support and answer, punctuality, dependability and reliability;
- kindness so good attitude, nice treating of purchaser, creating polite atmosphere,

empathy, and willingness to solve his problems;

- respect – treating patient as important person, treating his matters and problems seriously, patience, individual attitude towards every person, ability of apologising when it is needed, respect of purchaser's time;

- professionalism – the ability of giving full information, the best knowledge about the company and its offer, effectiveness in action, adviser skills, taking care of customer's satisfaction;

- good relations – highlighting that the customer satisfaction is important (even overtaking his expectations);

- availability – adapting the opening hours to the needs of customers, fast answering the phone calls, fast reaction to patient's problems reported to health centre staff.

These assumptions are confirmed by the Figure 2, which shows the relations between feeling the level of medical service quality with customer/patient and using the marketing rules.

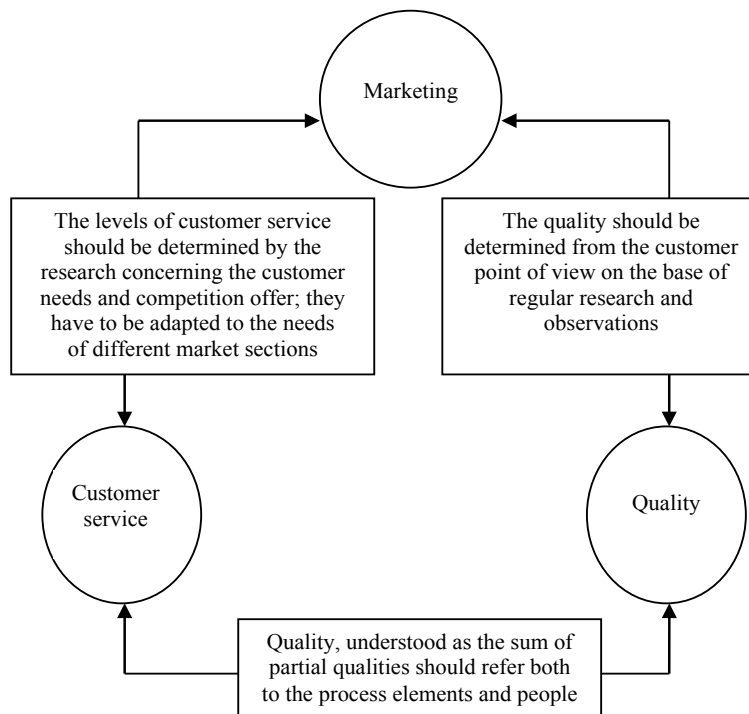


Figure 2 – Mutual relations between quality, customer service and marketing [10]

Customers/patients buy services and products, which provide them the best value, so the difference between total value for a customer and total cost incurred by the customer.

Customers choose this marketing offer which is the most valuable for them. They maximize the value in the case of cost of searching the product and their limited knowledge, mobility and given income. They form their expectations according to value and they aspire to their realising.

They compare real value given in the time of consuming a particular product with the expected value and this comparison has the basic impact on the level of their satisfaction with given offer and the decision about next purchasing [6, p. 520].

Survey research concerning the factors influencing the patients when they are choosing the health care centre. In connection with above mentioned statements, the research has been conducted among patients to determine the conscious factors influencing the choice of health care centre. 85 people at age of 24-40 from different health care centre, living in the Silesia and Lodz districts, have been surveyed. The choice of research sample has been the choice of intentional units. The tool of research has been the survey. The research has been single and survey. 79% of women and 21% of men have taken part in the research. For the question concerning the factors influencing their choice of health care centre the surveyed women gave the following answers (Fig. 3).

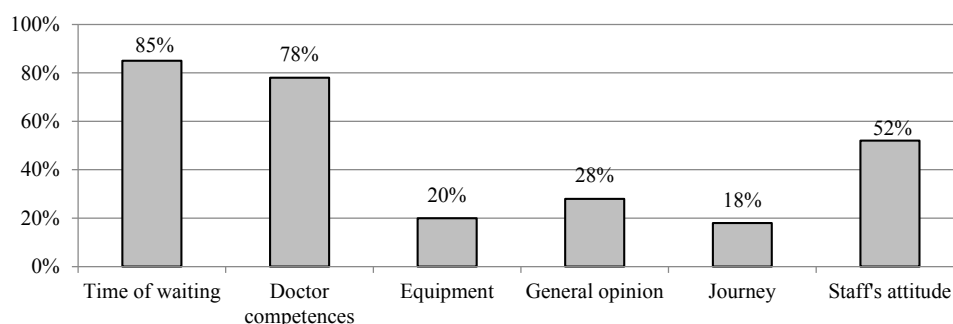


Figure 3 – The factors influencing the choice of health care centre in the case of women (author's personal study on the base of research)

The Figure 3 shows that the most important factors are the time of waiting for an appointment and the doctor's competences. The staff's attitude towards patients is important as well. The least important is the journey to the centre. In the case of men the results have been the following (Fig. 4).

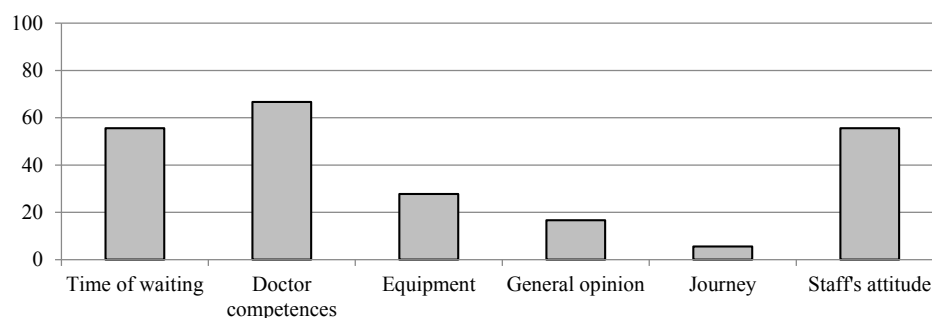


Figure 4 – The factors influencing the choice of health care centre in the case of men (author's personal study on the base of research)

The figure shows that the most important factor for men are doctor's competences, next the time of waiting and staff's attitude. The journey to the centre is the least important. Summing up both results we have the following data (Fig. 5).

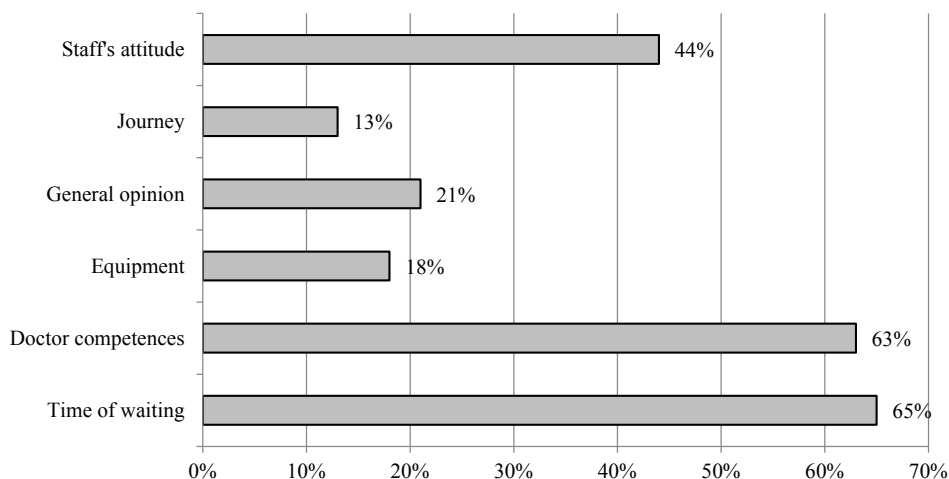


Figure 5 – The factors influencing the choice of health care centre
(author's personal study on the base of research)

Both in the case of women and men the most important factors influencing the choice of health care centre are time of waiting, doctor's competences and staff's attitude to patient. The least important is journey. It reflects in the factors influencing the choice of health care centre in other European countries.

Conclusions and prospects for further researches. The information about the factors influencing the choice of health care centre allows focusing on the elements which are dependent on the health care centre so the doctor's competences and proper staff training to gain the desirable and acceptable way of treating patients.

Unfortunately, shorter queues and next shorten time of waiting for an appointment, demanded by patients, are hard to achieve in many cases of health centres. Long queues to specialists and long- time waiting are general problem of health care sector not only in Poland but in European countries.

The research above has been survey. It proved that the factors described in the subject literature as those which influence the choice of health care centre. The research enables to highlight pointed factors as those which can decide about the competition advantage in the case of health care centres.

Obviously, the research needs deeper analysis, examining the relation between the choice of health centre and general availability in particular region, the health condition of patients / customers, their mobility etc. This research only shows the general tendency and some kind of patients' "whishing" in the case of actions connected with service in health care centres. It can be useful as the point of paying attention to these factors which can be

improved in the health centres, by means of staff's training, taking care of fulfilling the needs of patients. These needs do not often concern directly the medical services but widely understood the culture of human contacts.

This article can be used as the point of departure for following discussion and deepening the knowledge about the customer service.

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А.М. Круковська-Мілер. Фактори, що впливають на пацієнтів при виборі центрів охорони здоров'я в Польщі

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Фактори, що впливають на пацієнтів при виборі центрів охорони здоров'я в Польщі

Метою статті є аналіз факторів, що впливають на пацієнтів при виборі послуг у сфері охорони здоров'я. Автором наведені види потреб та особливості медичних послуг, від яких залежить попит на них безпосередніх споживачів. Стаття має методичний та дослідницький характер.

Ключові слова: потреби, центри охорони здоров'я, пацієнти, послуги для пацієнтів, час очікування медичної допомоги.

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Факторы, влияющие на пациентов при выборе центров охраны здоровья в Польше

Целью статьи является анализ факторов, влияющих на пациентов при выборе услуг в сфере охраны здоровья. Автором приведены виды потребностей и особенности медицинских услуг, от которых зависит спрос на них непосредственно потребителей. Статья имеет методический и исследовательский характер.

Ключевые слова: потребности, центры охраны здоровья, пациенты, услуги для пациентов, время ожидания медицинской помощи.

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