

## Patients' observations on dental office

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### Summary

The purpose of the was to find out what the patients think of the staff, organization of work and the dental office equipment. Ninety-eight patients expressed their opinion answering open-ended questions making a part of a more extensive questionnaire. The patients perceive the situation and form their own idea of a well-organized dental office and the staff relationships. The data obtained refer to the quality of work, the personality of the dentist and personal characteristics of the other medical staff as well as to the office equipment and the organization of work. The human factor (the quality of work, personal characteristics of the dentist and the medical personnel) appears in 62.9% characteristics as a reason for dissatisfaction, while objective circumstances (the organization of work and the office equipment) in 37.1%. The human factor (found in 47 different characteristics, i.e. 78.3% is much more important than objective circumstances (13 characteristics, i.e. 21.6%) in assessing essential characteristics of a dental office and its medical staff. Patients in the dental office scrutinizingly observe the behaviour of the dentist, the nurse and the clerk. Satisfaction of consumers of medical services, can be substantially enhanced by improved human relationships.

**Key words:** patients' observations, dental office

### INTRODUCTION

Essential elements of the relationship between the medical staff and the patients are in our country comprehensively defined by the law on health protection and health insurance,<sup>1</sup> and directly or indirectly by a number of other laws, regulations and self-management agreements. All medical staff in SFR Yugoslavia are also bound by the Ethical Code for the Medical staff in Yugoslavia.<sup>2</sup>

In other parts of the world this is likewise regulated according to the social organization of the country, its economic development and the level of medical services, to mention only a few of the relevant factors.<sup>3</sup> According to Bezroukov,<sup>4</sup> however, the staff presents the main problem in improving oral health care in the world.

Practicing dentists, dental researchers, psychologists and psychiatrists are increasingly paying attention to the relationship between the dentist and the patient. (Corah and col.<sup>5</sup>, Corah and col.<sup>6</sup>, Runyon<sup>7</sup>, Skogedal and Helöe<sup>8</sup>, Singer and Sheppard<sup>9</sup>, Lengkeek and col.<sup>10</sup> Reinelt<sup>11</sup>, Buddeberg<sup>12</sup>, Garfunkel<sup>13</sup>, Bier-Katz<sup>14</sup>, Shuval<sup>15</sup>, Estabrook and col.<sup>16</sup>).

This has resulted in a large number of data on the evaluation of the present situation and on the measures to be undertaken in order to improve the relationship between the dentist and the patient from their first contacts and thus to alleviate the patient's anxiety before the treatment and to help him get used to the atmosphere of the dental office (Weinstein and col.<sup>17</sup>, Weinstein and col.<sup>18</sup>, Scott and Hirschman<sup>19</sup>, Strevel<sup>20</sup>, Reinelt<sup>21</sup>).

A dental office is a working place of the dentist and other medical staff and at the same time a place intended for the patients. But if not in need of dental help, the patients would probably spend this time in a different way. Thus it is evident that two different categories of people enter the dental office: on the one side the medical staff and the dentist who have chosen this place to satisfy their needs for professional and social assertion and they enter this place of their own free will. The other category is made up of the patients entering this place from necessity. Thus perceptions of these two different categories of people about one and the same dental office cannot be identical. The fact, however, is that are equally important, the observations and opinions of the patients on everything going on within this place cannot and must not be irrelevant to the dentist or any other person working in the dental office. This was one of the reasons why we were interested, in the framework of this study, in the patients observations on a dental office. We were interested in their opinion on the organization of work, the dental office equipment and the staff working there.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

Presented here are only some of the results of the more extensive investigations conducted in the General Dentistry Department of the Dental School Clinic in the period from Feb. 10-19, 1981.

The investigations involved 98 persons classified according to:

- |    |           |         |
|----|-----------|---------|
| a) | age       | Table 1 |
| b) | sex       | Table 2 |
| c) | education | Table 3 |

We tried to find out the patients' opinions by means of openended questions making a part of a more extensive questionnaire. The patients were asked to fill ou the questionnaire, if they wanted to, while waiting in the dental waiting room. Among others they were asked to answer the following two questions:

- »What do you usually find most annoying in the work of a dental office?«
- »What do you consider the most important characteristics of a dental office and its staff?«

Table 1.

## DISTRIBUTION OF PATIENTS ACCORDING TO AGE

AGE	f	f in %
up to 20 years	19	
20 yrs 1 mnth to 25 yrs	19	
25 yrs 1 mnth to 35 yrs	25	
35 yrs 1 mnth to 45 yrs	10	
45 yrs 1 mnth to 55 yrs	8	
55 yrs 1 mnth to 65 yrs	6	
65 yrs and over	1	
TOTAL	98	

Table 2.

## DISTRIBUTION OF PATIENTS ACCORDING TO SEX

SEX	f	f in %
Men	38	
Women	60	
TOTAL	98	

Table 3.

## DISTRIBUTION OF PATIENTS ACCORDING TO EDUCATION

EDUCATION	f	f in %
Primary	6	
Secondary	40	
Higher	12	
High	40	
TOTAL	98	

**RESULTS**

From the results obtained it can be concluded that our patients spend a considerable time thinking about the good and bad characteristics of a dental office, that they perceive the existing situation and that they from their own idea

of a well organized dental office and the staff relationships. The results are as follows:

Leaving aside the details of the patients perception on the dental office the following has been obtained:

– if the situations observed by the patients as annoying in the work of a dental office are simply classified into two groups and if one of them is termed a human factor (the quality of work, personal characteristics of the dentist and medical staff), and the other objective circumstances (the organization of work and the office equipment) we can see that the human factor as a reason for dissatisfaction appears in 62,9% characteristics, while objective circumstances in 37,1%.

– if the same classification is made for the situation when we are interested to learn what positive characteristics of a dental office and its staff are essential for the patients we find that the human factor is much more important than objective circumstances. Human factor as a requirement appears in 47 different characteristics (78,3%), while objective circumstances in our study appear with only 13 characteristics (i.e. 21,6%). This information gains more in its importance if individual characteristics are perceived by a larger number of patients.

## DISCUSSION

Increased effort is being made at the beginning of the dental curriculum today to train sistematically students of dentistry how to improve their skills of discriminating the signs given by the patient and the skills of communication.

Runyon and Cohen<sup>7</sup> quote Froelich and Bishop who say that although all people communicate, the ability to communicate skillfully and with purpose rarely occurs as a gift- it is learned. Buddeberg<sup>12</sup> says that students with authoritative

Table 4.

	DEFICIENCIES IN THE WORK OF A DENTAL OFFICE	ESSENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A DENTAL OFFICE AND ITS STAFF
QUALITY OF WORK	– poor quality work	– good, sound work (18.4%)
	– superficiality	– good quality work (12.2%)
	– irresponsibility to patients	– coscientious work
	– too hasty	– through work
	– hasty decision to extract a tooth, no effort made to save it	– precision
	– very fast treatment	– careful work
	– »assembly line« treatment	– effort of perfection
	– negligence	– detailed treatment
	– careless work	– considering patient's complete history
	– incomplete service	– solid work
	– analgesics insufficiently applied for painful drilling	– efficiency
		– painless treatment



Table 4. — cont'd

	DEFICIENCIES IN THE WORK OF A DENTAL OFFICE	ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A DENTAL OFFICE AND ITS STAFF
DENTAL OFFICE EQUIPMENT	— poorly equipped, outdated equipment	— well equipped
	— dirt	— good quality material
	— dirt glasses	— cleanliness, hygiene
	— unsuitable waiting rooms	— understanding patients' needs
		— a tidy dental office
	DEFICIENCIES IN THE WORK OF A DENTAL OFFICE	ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A DENTAL OFFICE AND ITS STAFF
ORGANIZATION OF WORK IN A DENTAL OFFICE	— long waiting time (57.5%)	— appointments arranged, visits well planned
	— patient not called in as arranged by appointment	— well organized work
	— queue jumping	— discipline
	— long periods between appointments	— keeping appointed time
	— poor organization	— brief treatment
	— too many patients	— all necessary services done at one place
	— unpunctuality	— uncrowded dental office
	— appointment time not respected	— piece and quiet
	— staff meeting during working hours	— dental office near the patient's home

behaviour achieved poorer results and had fewer patients than the other group of students who were told to express a more gentle approach to the patients. The whole mouth area is the area of strong emotional reactions and thus the reactions of patients do not depend only on the dentist's knowledge, but on how his knowledge will be applied in the treatment.

In the very first contact between the dentist and the patient each of them has his own ideas, attitudes and expectations. If they are not identical or similar, problems will arise. Mutual messages are not exchanged only in words but also non-verbally, by the body posture, gesticulation, facial expressions and reactions of the vegetative body system. In fact most messages at the dentist's are non-

-verbal. Therefore it is the task of the dentist to bring their mutual communication to the same level. Thus the dentist should explain the findings to the patient and describe why, when and how the necessary procedure will be carried out. It is very important how the dentist treats his nurses, since in the majority of cases the patient will transfer this model of behaviour to the relationship dentist-patient (Buddeberg<sup>1</sup>).

Observations of the patients on the dental office in the way they were obtained could be used for various purposes. One of these could be to start analysing the organization of work of the office concerned. From the results of our sample and without any additional analyses some improvements in the organization could be also made (such as making patients' appointments, avoiding to take patients without a previously made appointment, clean and pleasant waiting rooms, etc.). However even if all objective circumstances were changes in the way suggested by our patients only 37,1% objections or 22,6% basic but nonexistent (missing) objective circumstances would be improved. But what about the others? The other 62,9% of the observed inadequacies belong to the area of human factor, i.e. the human factor could satisfy the remaining 78,3% suggestions. Habits, skills and knowledge of the dentist and other staff are responsible for the quality of their work, while attitudes, ideals, certain personal characteristics in the form of unselfishness, empathy, human concern, understanding, tact and consideration are those personal characteristics that, if we possess them will make our work ethical and valuable, and the patient, will perceive this work as humane and feel deep satisfaction when leaving such dental office.

## CONCLUSION

Patients in the dental office scrutinizingly observe the behaviour of all staff – from the dentist and the nurse to the clerks. On the ground of these observations the patients make their judgement on the quality of work of a dental office, on personal characteristics of the dentist and other staff, on the equipment and the organization of work in the office. However, the human factor itself has the most prominent place. Consequently, regardless of the financial and technical problems of health services, the satisfaction of consumers of these services can be substantially enhanced by improving human relationships.

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## ZAPAŽANJA PACIJENATA U STOMATOLOŠKOJ AMBULANTI

### Sažetak

U radu se nastojalo ispitati mišljenje pacijenata o osoblju, organizaciji rada i opremljenosti stomatološke ambulante. Zapažanja 98 pacijenata ispitivana su pomoću pitanja otvorenog tipa, koja su predstavljala dio šired anketnog upitnika. Pacijenti percipiraju situaciju, te imaju svoju viziju jedne dobre stomatološke ambulante i odnosa u njoj. Dobiveni podaci se odnose na kvalitetu rada, na osobne karakteristike liječnika stomatologa, na osobne karakteristike ostalog medicinskog osoblja, na podatke o opremi ambulante, te o organizaciji rada. Ljudski faktor (kvalitet rada, osobne karakteristike liječnika i medicinskog osoblja, kao razlog nezadovoljstva se pojavljuje u 62,9% karakteristika, a objektivne okolnosti (organizacija rada i opremljenost ambulante) u 37,1%. Ljudski faktor (javlja se u 47 različitih karakteristika, 78,3%) je mnogo važniji od objektivnih okolnosti (13 karakteristika 21,6%) u procjeni koje tamo radi. Pacijenti u stomatološkoj ambulanti vrlo pažljivo prate ponašanje liječnika stomatologa, sestre i administratora. Unapređenjem međubitnosti karakteristika jedne stomatološke ambulante i zdravstvenog osoblja ljudskih odnosa se bitno može poboljšati zadovoljstvo korisnika liječnika.

**Ključne riječi:** zapažanja pacijenata, stomatološka ambulanta