

# Challenges of Activating Customers' Involvement Into Quality Assessment of Medical Services

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**Abstract.** The growing dissatisfaction of the population with the quality of medical services becomes an obstacle to the sustainable development of the territories and results in the population's disapproval of the actions of the authorities. The increasing dissatisfaction with the quality of medical services is accompanied by decreasing effectiveness of ongoing quality assessment due to the low activity of patients in the process of independent evaluation. One of the ways to solve the problem is to stimulate the involvement of consumers in the process of assessing the quality of medical services, so that the results can be used by healthcare institutions and authorities in decision-making on improvement of the quality and safety of medical organizations.

## 1. Introduction

Solving the problems of the medical service quality in the modern healthcare system of developed countries is considered to be one of the important results of social policy ensuring sustainable socio-economic development of states. In our country, ensuring the quality of medical services is associated with facing the challenge of persistent dissatisfaction of the population with medical services. This problem should be resolved not only by ensuring public satisfaction, but also through the development of confidence in medical service and the government in general. Therefore, it is of special socio-political significance. The analysis of scientific publications shows that recently there has been a contradiction between the growing demands of consumers for the quality of medical service and their low activity in the process of quality assessment. This hinders the development of consumer feedback to medical organizations, which reduces the effectiveness of the solutions they develop to improve the quality of medical services.

## 2. Methods and results

The World Health Organization conducts regular research in the field of healthcare services. The World Health Report 2013 "Research for Universal Health Coverage" says that health coverage with full access to high-quality services ... cannot be achieved without data from scientific research [1]. For Russia, the quality and accessibility of medical services is also the target of scientific research, which

is mostly of practical importance. The increase in consumer dissatisfaction with the activities of medical organizations observed in Russia leads to a shift in their behaviour in the process of responding to a decrease in quality, accessibility and safety: from complaints in medical organizations and healthcare authorities to appeals to law enforcement agencies. Thus, in 2018 the amount of criminal cases initiated in connection with medical errors increased by 24% in comparison with 2017. The number of complaints about doctors increased by 9.5%. Over the past six years, the number of criminal cases has increased 7 times, and the number of complaints 3 times [2]. Moreover, the development of information and communication technologies has led to an increase in the activity of dissatisfied consumers of medical services in social networks and information platforms such as 4geo, Flamp [3, 4]. Negative consumer reviews have a negative impact on the image of domestic medical organizations and, accordingly, their competitiveness.

Recently, the Ministry of Healthcare has been improving methodological approaches to independent consumer assessment of the quality of medical services [5] and the internal control of the quality and safety of medical activities [2], which are formed on the basis of scientific justification. For the first time, not only state-owned, but also private medical organizations are involved in the consumer assessment process. Thus, consumers of medical services are included in the process of influencing the decisions on the quality of service in medical organizations not only at the request of individual medical organizations, but also in the legislative plan at the level of the Ministry of Healthcare. In its strategic decisions the state defines the tasks in the field of quality of medical services as priority, in particular, the implementation of the national project "Healthcare" is designed to increase the availability and quality of healthcare services in the Russian Federation [6]. Regional authorities are taking measures to attract the population to the development of proposals in order to make decisions on improving medical services. Therefore, in Moscow a crowdsourcing project "Moscow Clinic" was implemented with the aim of improving the work of city clinics based on complaints and wishes of a wide range of Moscow residents applying their creative abilities, knowledge and experience in using information technologies.

The main tool for involving the population in the process of improving the activities of medical organizations is participation in assessment of the quality of medical services. Meanwhile, the authors conducted initiative desk and field studies as part of an interfunctional group that showed a number of practical problems with participation of medical service consumers in the process of their evaluation [7, 8], in particular, low consumer involvement in the process of assessing the quality of medical services, which leads to inefficiency of respondent polls. A survey of patients conducted in Krasnoyarsk emergency hospital (BSMP) showed that the amount of respondents did not exceed 30% of the total population.

It is noteworthy that in order to improve the process of assessing the quality of medical services, in addition to offline questionnaires, the Ministry of Healthcare of the Russian Federation introduced interactive questionnaires based on information technologies, which, according to the developers, should increase independence and provide broader coverage. However, studies have shown that respondents are even less active in surveys online than offline. Identification of the reasons for low consumer involvement in the surveys showed that the factors are: lack of skills in working with Internet technologies, imperfection of methodological support for consumer surveys; behavioural factors [7, 9].

Stimulating the involvement of consumers and the population as a whole in the process of assessing the quality of medical services is becoming the most important task in improving the effectiveness of surveys and practical decisions taken as a result. Consequently, the involvement of consumers of medical services in the process of assessing their quality is becoming an object of scientific research. Let us note that recently research has been conducted on the problems of population's involvement in economic processes, in particular in the development of competition based on the use of Internet technologies, which showed the emergence of 3 basic models of involvement in Internet technologies:

- for influencing business structures and authorities;

- for interacting with authorities and business on the issue of market development;
- for implementing protest forms [10].

The content analysis of Krasnoyarsk consumer reviews at such information platforms as 4geo, Flamp and Odoktor, as well as the results of the surveys of Russian Public Opinion Research Centre and other research organizations, which was carried out as part of the study, showed that a model of protest forms is prevailing among Russian consumers. This, in our opinion, is explained by the unwillingness of the authorities, sectoral healthcare authorities and personnel of medical organizations to develop models of interaction with consumers for improving the service quality. Currently, consumer comments are perceived as complaints, and not as suggestions for improving the service quality. On the other hand, consumers lack interaction skills and public confidence in medical services and government, which leads to the formation of only negative interaction.

Meanwhile, the low involvement of consumers of medical services in the process of assessing the quality of activities of medical organizations requires identifying the problems. Foreign researchers note low consumer activity in assessing the quality of medical services, mainly due to the problem of dependence of patients on medical personnel. Thus, patients are sometimes not sincere and honest during interviews because they are afraid of changes in the attitude of the staff [11]. A survey of patients in BSMP in Krasnoyarsk revealed differentiated reasons for refusing to participate in the survey (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Dynamics of the reasons indicated by patients when refusing to participate in the assessment of medical service quality.

Reasons for refusal	2014	2017	2019
Distrust (there is no point in answering, it will not change anything)	30%	29%	28%
Feeling unwell	30%	33%	29%
Absence of understanding the structure of the services	20%	15%	20%
Ensuring personal safety (criticism may cause even worse attitude of medical staff)	10%	13%	16%
Indifference of patients	10%	10%	7%

The analysis of the distribution of respondents' answers allowed to determine rating for reasons. The data obtained showed that the patients' distrust of the actions of the heads of clinics and poor health are predominant in the reasons for the low involvement of patients in assessing the quality of medical services, poor understanding of the concepts of 'medical care' and 'medical services' by patients is in the second place. Psychological reasons, i.e. fears of worse attitude of medical personnel to patients and indifference to interviews stand in the last place.

### 3. Conclusions

Stimulating consumer involvement in an independent assessment of the quality of medical services is becoming important both for healthcare and for evaluation of the effectiveness of activities and improvement of regional authorities [12, 14].

The studies conducted allowed to conclude that in order to increase the involvement of patients in the process of evaluating medical activities of organizations, it is necessary to increase the effectiveness of the actions of management and staff on improvement of the medical service quality, which will lead to an increase in consumer confidence in decisions made and their understanding. An important area of scientific research is the determination of a relevant methodological approach to assessing the quality of the activities of medical organizations as a complex category, as well as the quality of the assessment tools themselves.

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