Reviewer's report

Title: Hospital outpatient perceptions of the physical environment of waiting areas: the role of patient characteristics on atmospherics in one academic medical center

Version: 1 Date: 16 May 2007
Reviewer: Andrew M Garratt

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1 Introduction. This should start with some information relating to the importance of the physical environment and the waiting area in particular. Evidence from previous studies should then be introduced before leading into methods of measuring patient satisfaction or experience with the waiting area.

The authors have missed some important literature relating to the role of patient characteristics and their association with patient satisfaction. Crow is a huge review that has found a number of variables to be consistently associated with satisfaction across multiple studies.


2 Questionnaire development. I would like to see more information relating to the development of the questionnaire. References are provided but how and why were the 15 items or areas chosen. How were the items constructed? To what extent did the literature or existing questionnaires inform development? How many researchers were involved? Was there some sort of a group consensus? Were the items pre-tested with patients? Did all of the items include a not applicable option or just some?

3 Did the authors consider undertaking some form of multivariate analysis. It is possible that there are confounding variables in the analyses that are presented. Multiple regression analysis could be used with the 15 items are regressed on the remainder of the variables after considering the number of cases available for analysis. Two of the references above have undertaken such analyses.

4 Did the authors consider developing a summated rating scale based on the items that make the most important contribution to an overall measure of waiting room environment? This would involve undertaking an exploratory principal component or factor analysis to assess which of the variables make the most important contribution. It is possible that several components/factors may be found each comprising several items. Provided they are supported by theory or previous research, they could then be used to construct rating scales based on classical test theory. This would involve the use of item-total correlation and Cronbach’s alpha.

5 The English requires some attention throughout the paper and should really be given to an organisation offering such a service. There are also author names within the text.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Minor essential revisions
1 In addition to the 15 items, how many other questions were included and how were they scaled?

2 The number of patients that declined to participate should be reported.

3 Please check the use of decimal places conforms to the journal requirements.

4 I would have liked to have seen the number of not applicable and missing data in Table 2.

5 Issues of social desirability bias should be discussed. There is some evidence that patients completing patient satisfaction questionnaires have higher levels of satisfaction compared to those receiving questionnaires in the post.

6 Was the questionnaire given to the patients before or after they had a consultation. How long were did they wait before receiving a questionnaire. This is an important consideration given that they will have needed time to appraise the waiting room.

**What next?:** Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.