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Factors affecting patients' ratings of health-care satisfaction.

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Abstract: Surveys that include rating scales are commonly used to collect data about patients' experiences. We studied how patients associated their ratings with their experiences of care.

A survey and a qualitative study were conducted at a Danish hospital. Initially, 19 female patients completed a questionnaire using the response categories from very good to very bad; and subsequently they participated in a semi-structured interview held within two days after they completed the questionnaire. Additionally, 44 female patients participated in an interview within six weeks of completing a questionnaire. A phenomenological-hermeneutical approach was used in the analysis and interpretation.

Two major themes emerged: experienced versus expected clinical quality and health-care professional attitude. Patients responded to each question by combining their experiences of both themes, e.g. a "very good" experience required that clinical service was provided at the expected level, at the very least, and that it was provided with recognition and respect.

The female patients associated their experiences with their ratings, and two types of relation seemed to be at play: a care relation and a human relation. This finding can inform health-care practice, but department-specific examples may be needed to initiate improvements.

The study received funding from the Centre for Patient Experience and Evaluation, Copenhagen, Denmark. The Danish Scientific Ethical Committees deemed it unnecessary to be involved in this project.

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