Patient Expectations and Motivations for Attendance at a University-Operated Student Podiatry Clinic

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Summary of the research

University-operated student clinics are a feature of several undergraduate health programs, for example in podiatry and dentistry. When prospective patients at these clinics often have the choice to attend a private practice or a government funded public clinic, it remains unclear why some elect to attend the student clinic in preference.

This pilot study aimed to elucidate podiatry patient motivations for attending the Charles Sturt University Allied Health Clinic and the initial expectations that these patients have about their encounters at the clinic. The development and limited validation of a draft questionnaire was included as an element of this study.

Qualitative data were derived from a sample of clinic patients, undergraduate students, and clinical educators by means of focus group interviews. Analysis of the data generated items for inclusion in the questionnaire. Responses were arranged into three main groups: initial patient expectations of the clinic and its services, motivation for initial attendance, and motivation for continuing attendance at the clinic. Categorisation of responses comprised attendance and general treatment, the students, the clinical supervisors, time spent in the clinic, treatment plans and education, privacy, referral systems, finances, and finally the clinic experience. Validity testing of the draft questionnaire was conducted using a small sample of patients, students, and academic staff, and analysis was limited to face and content validity.

Whilst low cost treatment is a major motivating reason for student clinic attendance, it appears that patients are more highly motivated by the perceived quality of podiatric care. Additionally, many patients wish to support the university and the education of its students. Although a range of features are influential in motivating patients to keep attending the student clinic, they had no expectations prior to their first visit to the clinic. Accordingly, this category was not included in the draft questionnaire.

Acknowledging patient motivations and fulfilling their expectations, ensures that the podiatry clinic sustains a viable patient base. This is essential for the continued existence of the student clinic and for maintaining the intrinsic benefits of clinical education in an undergraduate podiatry program.