

Patient's trust in their physicians of the obstetrics and gynecology departments in Greece

Chadzopulu A,* Adraniotis J, Eurframidu EN.

Kavala Hospital, Kavala, Greece

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Trust in one's health care provider is essential as it may foster compassion, confidentiality of patient medical information, continuity of care, greater support and quality care

Purpose: To evaluate patient trust in their physicians of the obstetrics and gynecology departments.

Results: We used the Trust in Physician Scale comprising 11 - items. Data were collected from 109 women hospitalized in the obstetrics and gynecology departments in Kavala in Greece.

Results: Of the surveyed 47.4% from Greece did not doubt their doctor's proper care. Almost of 58.7% the respondents agreed with the statement "I trust my doctor very much, that is why I always comply with his/her advice". More than 56.9% of the patients were convinced that "if my physician

tells me something, this has to be the truth". Almost 43.1% of patients declared trust in their physician's therapy. Nearly half of women was convinced that their doctor is a true expert in the treatment of their diseases. Nearly 36% of the patients did not declare fear of their physician not keeping the professional secret.

Conclusion: Most of the respondents doubted the proper medical care for obstetric-gynecological departments. Women do not trust the opinions and decisions of their doctors and do not consider them to be experts. Patients were afraid that the doctors do not respect the secrecy concerning their treatment.

Keywords trust scale, patient, physician, Poland, Greece

***Corresponding author:**

General Hospital of Kavala
Agios Silas 65-500 Kavala
Greece

Email: antygonah@interia.pl (Chadzopulu Antigoni)

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INTRODUCTION

Trust in one's health care provider is essential as it may foster compassion, confidentiality of patient medical information, continuity of care, greater support and quality care [1]. Even well-informed and knowledgeable patients have to rely on their physicians to provide them with appropriate information, keep personal information confidential, provide competent care, and act in their best interests.

According to Blenkiron and Hammill [2], satisfaction with health services correlated significantly with satisfaction in other areas of patients' lives, such as housing, money, social life and relationships. Patient satisfaction ratings are increasingly promoted as indicators of the quality of care [3]. However, satisfaction scores do not take into account differences between patients that may be due to sociodemographic characteristics or the type of illness rather than the quality of service delivered [4-6].

Trust is seen as important in its own right because it is the attribute that gives medical relationships intrinsic value, but trust is also critical in a more instrumental fashion. Trust is critical to patients' willingness to seek care, reveal sensitive information, submit to treatment, and follow physicians' recommendations [7].

For effective treatment, physicians need to elicit trust almost instantaneously with new patients who know virtually nothing about them [8,9].

There are several models of the physician-patient relationship [8,10,11]. First is the *paternalistic* model, sometimes called the paternal. In this model, the physician-patient interaction ensures that patients receive the interventions that best promote their health and well-being. The physician acts as the patient's guardian. The second model - *informative* - assumes a fairly clear distinction between facts and values. The patient's values are well defined and known. It is the physician's obligation to provide all the available facts. The third model is the *interpretive* model. The aim of the physician-patient interaction is to elucidate the patient's values and what he or she actually wants. The patient's values are not necessarily fixed and known to the patient. In the *deliberative* model, the physician acts as a teacher or friend, engaging the patients in dialogue on what course of action would be best. The physician indicates what the patient should do, what decision regarding medical therapy would be admirable.

The Trust in Physician (TIP) scale [12] is an 11-item self-report questionnaire used to assess patients' trust in their doctor with regards to their dependability, confidence in their ability, and their confidentiality of information. It does not examine beliefs about the physician's ability to affect health

outcomes. Over the past decade, five different research teams have developed and validated multi-item scales that quantify the level of patient trust, and have applied these instruments in a variety of settings [12-15].

To our knowledge, no studies have examined trust within the patient-gynecologist relationship in Greece.

The purpose of this study was to assess patient trust in their physicians of the obstetrics and gynecology departments in Greece.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

We used the Trust in Physician scale (TIP) Anderson's and Dedrick's comprising 11-items. This questionnaire measures three dimensions of trust: physician dependability, confidence in physician knowledge and skills, confidentiality, and reliability of information received from the physician. Items are answered in a 5-point Likert scale format, ranging from 'totally disagree' to 'totally agree': 1- Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3 -Neutral (neither disagree or agree), 4 - Agree, 5-Strongly Agree. We calculated the percentages and mean values of the scores obtained from the answers to particular questions of the scale. Internal reliability is excellent (Cronbach alpha = 0.90), although no factor analysis could be conducted to identify the three dimensions of trust. The validity of the measure, by comparison with other trust scales, showed moderate correlation with these other measures. The TPS is scored by reverse scoring items 1, 5, 7, and 11 and summing all items for the total score. Higher scores reflect more of the construct (trust).

Non-parametric statistic (Chi-square test) was used to assess the differences between the answers of women. We used a two-tailed significance ($p < 0.05$) for all analyses.

Data were collected from 109 women hospitalized at the obstetrics and gynecology departments in Kavala Hospital in Greece.

RESULTS

Of 40.4% the respondents were in the 36-45 years age range, 20.2% in the 56-70 years, 18.3% in the 46-55 years, 11.9% in the 26-35 years, and only 6.4% were over 70

Of 62.4% these patients had husbands. Thirteen 4.8% of the respondents from Greece were single. There were only 10.1% widows. The surveyed from both countries more often had vocational training -39.4%. As many 43.1% had a primary education. Of the respondents, 17.4% had a secondary education.

Overall, 70.6% women worked physically. Sixty-six 38.5% respondents did intellectual work.

Of the surveyed, 49.5% women had professional work, and 21.1% - had an occupational pension.

The surveyed women most often given the following answers:

- *I doubt that my doctor really cares about me as a person:* 47.7% patient - strongly disagree/ disagree and 31.2% of the respondents had no opinion on this matter.
- *My doctor is usually considerate of my needs and puts them first:* 49.5% of the respondents agree/strongly agree and 35.8% patients could not express a definite opinion.
- *I trust my doctor so much, I always try to follow his/her advice:* 58.8% of the respondents declared agree/strongly agree and 30.3% patients had no opinion.
- *If my doctor tells me something is so, then it must be true:* 56.9% of the women agree/strongly agree and 31.2% women had no opinion on this matter.
- *I sometimes distrust my doctor's opinion and would like a second one:* 43.1% of the women agree/strongly agree and 36.7% women neutral opinion.
- *I trust my doctor's judgments about my medical care:* 45.9% - agree/strongly agree and 32% women had no opinion on this matter.
- *I feel my doctor does not do everything he/she should for my medical care:* 30.2% - strongly disagree/ disagree and 34.9% - agree/strongly agree
- *I trust my doctor to put my medical needs above all other considerations when treating my medical problems:* 44.9% - agree/strongly agree and 42.2% neutral opinion.
- *My doctor is a real expert in taking care of medical problems like:* 54.2% - agree /strongly agree.
- *I trust my doctor to tell me if a mistake was made in my treatment:* 57.8% agree /strongly agree.
- *I sometimes worry that my doctor may not keep the information we discuss totally private:* 40.2% - agree/strongly agree and 35.8% - strongly disagree/ disagree.

The details of Anderson's and Dedrick's scale are summarized in Table 1

DISCUSSION

In the present study, patients reported a relatively low degree of trust in their gynecologists. Greek women did not trust their physicians, and declared that doctors did not do all for their care.

There are several explanations of these differences, e.g.,: system of health care, cultural differences, patient age, health status, education level and financial status. Nowadays, the health care sector in Greece is characterized as a mixed system of health care provision financed through salary based on the National Health System providers, prepaid administered payments based on social and private insurance funds and fee-for-service private practitioners [16].

Though, there is mixed evidence in the literature with regard to correlates of patient trust, and there are a lack of studies examining patient trust in gynecologists in particular.

This study investigating trust in gynecologists, which examines only patient socio-demographic correlates. Clinical and psychosocial correlates were not investigated.

In earlier investigations, age and self-reported health status were inconsistently associated with trust in a physician [17,18]. Trust levels were higher among patients with poor health [19]. In the current study, we did not examine clinical status of women.

Decreased trust was associated with older age, minority status, higher education, diagnosis of fibromyalgia or osteoarthritis, and poorer health [20]. Similarly, in the present report more respondents were older and had a decreased trust level. In our study, more women had a primary education.

Previous studies also suggest that there is increased trust with a greater duration of the patient-provider relationship [21], and it is likely that the relationship with a specialist is shorter than that with a primary-care doctor [21,22]. However, the shortage of primary care providers in the region translates to greater patient volume and therefore, less time spent with each patient.

In Kao study [21], nearly three fourths of all respondents believed that payment methods that may encourage use of medical services would have no effect on the quality of their care. However, more patients of fee-for-service physicians (17.6%) than of salaried physicians (6.8%) believed their care would improve if their physician was paid "each time (a test is carried out) rather than a fixed monthly amount." More patients of salaried physicians (20.3%) believed these incentives would make their care worse than patients of fee-for-service physicians (10.3%). We did not examine this relationship between the payment methods and the quality of care.

There is evidence to suggest that greater trust in the physician is associated with better adherence to the physician's instructions, which may ultimately improve outcomes of care.

Based on theoretical and empirical work by others on medical trust [8,19], and on general, social, and

institutional trust in other arenas [10] „we conceptualized general physician trust as having potentially five overlapping domains: (1) fidelity, which is caring and advocating for the patient’s interests or welfare and avoiding conflicts of interest; (2) competence, which is having good practice and interpersonal skills, making correct decisions, and avoiding mistakes; (3) honesty, which is telling the truth and avoiding intentional falsehoods; (4) confidentiality, which is proper use of sensitive information; and (5) global trust, which is the irreducible “soul” of trust, or aspects that combine elements from some or all of the separate dimensions [11].

In the present study, only 45.9% of women declared trust in their gynecologist’s judgments about medical care. A higher level of patients’ trust was found by Krajewska-Kułak et al. [23]. They assessed patients’ trust in their physicians and to compare a level of trust depending on the place of living: Poland and Belarus. Data were collected among 120 patients in hospitals in Białystok and Łomża, and 100 in Grodno. Almost 93% of patients from Poland and 80% from Belarus declared trust in the therapy recommended by a physician. Nearly 58% of patients from Poland and 18% from Belarus declared fear that physician might not keep a professional secret.

In similar study, Chilicka et al. [24] investigated patients’ trust in their physicians in the obstetrics and gynecology departments in Poland.

Among studied patients 23.3% did not doubt about a proper doctor’s care. Nearly 77 % of the respondents declared the trust in their physician’s therapy. Almost 84% of patients were convinced that their doctor is a true expert in treating diseases. They concluded that most patients trusted their physicians.

In conclusion, the results of our study indicate that the Trust in Physician Scale is an appropriate tool for assessing levels of patient trust in their gynecologist. In the present study, women reported a relatively low degree of trust in their gynecologists. Further studies are needed to determine how trust in the physician affects health outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Most of the respondents doubted the proper medical care for obstetric-gynecological departments.
2. Women do not trust the opinions and decisions of their doctors and do not consider them to be experts.
3. Patients were afraid that the doctors do not respect the secrecy concerning their treatment.

Table 1. Interpretation of physician-patient trust reported by patients of the obstetrics and gynecology departments

STATEMENT NUMBER/STATEMENT		RESPONSE POINT SCALE (number of responses to each question version)					Mean value score
		<i>Strongly Disagree</i> (1 score)	<i>Disagree</i> (2 score)	<i>Neutral (neither disagree or agree)</i> (3 score)	<i>Agree</i> (4 score)	<i>Strongly Agree</i> (5 score)	
		N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	
1	I doubt that my doctor really cares about me as a person	14.7%	33%	31.2%	18.3%	2.8%	2.6 ±1.03
2	My doctor is usually considerate of my needs and puts them first	5.5%	9.2%	35.8%	44%	5.5%	3.3 ±0.9
3	I trust my doctor so much, I always try to follow his/her advice	4.6%	6.4%	30.3%	45%	13.8%	3.6 ±0.96
4	If my doctor tells me something is so, then it must be true	5.5%	6.4%	31.2%	47.7%	9.2%	3.5 ±0.9
5	I sometimes distrust my doctor's opinion and would like a second one	3.3%	15.6%	36.7%	35.8%	7.3%	3.3 ±0.96
6	I trust my doctor's judgments about my medical care	4.6%	5.5%	32%	36.7%	9.2%	3.4 ±0.9
7	I feel my doctor does not do everything he/she should for my medical care	10.1%	20.2%	25.3%	22.7%	3.7%	3 ±1.04
8	I trust my doctor to put my medical needs above all other considerations when treating my medical problems	5.5%	7.3%	42.2%	38.5%	6.4%	3.3 ±0.9
9	My doctor is a real expert in taking care of medical problems like	1.8%	8.3%	24.7%	49.5%	4.7%	3.5 ±0.8
10	I trust my doctor to tell me if a mistake was made in my treatment	5.5%	20.2%	9.2%	56.9%	0.9%	3.3 ±1.01
11	I sometimes worry that my doctor may not keep the information we discuss totally private	6.4%	29.4%	22.9%	38.4%	1.8%	3.01 ±1.01

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