

How do we Know the Residents Are Happy?

Levy-Storms, L, Schnelle, J., & Simmons, S. (2002). A comparison of methods to assess nursing home residents' unmet needs. *The Gerontologist*, 42(4), 454-461.

Resident satisfaction surveys have been a source of contention for quite some time. Providers find them problematic because a bad day can skew results. Results can be suspect because of residents' advanced ages, varying levels of cognitive function, and fears of criticizing nursing home staff.

Closed-end satisfaction questions, "are you satisfied with the time you get up or go to bed?" generally result in a tendency toward higher scores. In a recent study, (Simmons, & Schnelle, 1999) nursing home residents responded positively to direct satisfaction questions about the frequency of toileting when direct observation revealed the residents received assistance to the toilet fewer than once in an 8 hour period.

Two other methods for measuring satisfaction have been employed, open-ended questions such as "if you could change the way staff help you with your food, what would it be?" and a discrepancy measure. The latter measures the difference between two responses: "How many times during the day would you like staff to help you walk?" and "How many times during the day do staff help you walk?"

In this study, the researchers used these three types of satisfaction measures to determine 70 long-term care residents' unmet ADL needs. The closed-end satisfaction questions, those most frequently employed by nursing homes, produced the lowest estimates of unmet needs with responses ranging from only 3% to 24%. The discrepancy measure estimated the highest unmet needs ranging from 36% to 76%, while the open-ended questions fell somewhere in between the other two types of surveys. Discrepancy answers provided the best information for use in improving the frequency or occurrence of ADL care.

Implications for practice: if you want information that will help you to improve care on an individual basis, consider changing your satisfaction surveys to discrepancy questions. If possible the survey should be administered by someone outside the facility so that residents will not favorably distort their answers to please staff.

Additional Resources:

Satisfaction surveys in Long-Term Care, (2000). J.Cohen-Mansfield, F. Ejaz, & P. Werner (Eds.), New York: Springer.