

ABSTRACT

Client-centredness holds the central place in the Finnish national health care quality management recommendations. Quality care research in postnatal wards has mainly been focused on the mother and her newborn child. In this study both parents were observed as clients of a postnatal wards. The task of the study was to assess client-centred quality in postnatal wards from the perspective of mothers, fathers as well as nursing personnel, and search for quality-related factors and ways for quality development.

The research was carried out in Finland and Estonia where the quality of care from the perspective of the whole family has not been studied earlier, nor have any comparisons been made between the countries. The aim of the study was to gather information that could be used for developing the activities of postnatal wards, training the nursing personnel, making decisions in support of nursing activities by hospital managers and for maternity care in its broader sense. The EU enlargement and free movement of services, residents and employees have increased the need for information on the level of quality of care in member states. The aim of the study is to enable to develop the quality of care by means of international cooperation and produce comparable information to rely on.

By its nature the study is a descriptive and comparative survey in which data source triangulation and, as its part, a number of essay-type open-ended questions, which disclose the opinions of respondents were methodologically linked. The study data source was collected from mothers (in Finland n=291, in Estonia n=198), fathers (in Finland n=258, in Estonia n=122), nursing personnel (in Finland n=102, in Estonia n=34) and physicians (in Finland n=6, in Estonia n=7). The structured data source was analysed statistically, the data source collected from open-ended questions was analysed by way of content analysis.

Quality of care in postnatal wards varied. Most of the quality criteria were important for the parents in the opinions of mothers, fathers and nursing personnel. Quality expectations of mothers exceeded those of fathers in both Finland and Estonia. Nursing personnel in Finland knew the quality expectations of even the most demanding parents. The nurses regarded only a third of some single quality criteria as a bit less important than mothers and over a tenth of them as less important than fathers. In Estonia, nursing personnel did not know the quality expectations of parents. The nurses estimated over a half of the quality criteria as less important than mothers and under a half of them as less important than fathers.

Finnish mothers who always considered quality criteria as important evaluated fulfilment of quality from good to reasonable, fathers and nursing personnel – from good to satisfactory. In Estonia, quality of care varied from good to poor in the opinion of mothers, from good to reasonable in the opinion of fathers and nursing personnel. In Finland as well as Estonia, discrepancies between quality expectations and fulfilment of fathers were smaller than those of mothers. Nurses' opinions of quality fulfilment differed more from the opinions of mothers than those of fathers in both Finland and Estonia. In Finland, nearly a fourth of single quality criteria were better fulfilled in the opinions of nurses than in the opinions of parents and differences were not great either. In Estonia, two-thirds of quality criteria were better fulfilled in the opinions of nurses than in the opinions of mothers, a fourth of those were better fulfilled than in the opinions of fathers, and differences between opinions were bigger than in Finland. In both countries, mothers, fathers and nursing personnel considered mothers, compared to fathers, to have the central place in nursing activities. Finnish parents considered their quality expectations as better fulfilled than Estonian parents did. Opinions of nursing personnel in different countries did not differ as much as opinions of parents. However, some significant differences were found.

The open-ended questions revealed that the main reason for low quality was the care environment. According to parents, rooms were not well suited for the expected activities neither in Finland nor Estonia. Restrictions on the presence of fathers complicated nursing activities in the opinions of mothers, fathers and nursing personnel. Shortcomings were also mentioned in the preconditions for high-quality nursing care. In relation to the shortcomings a number of suggestions for remedy were made.

The study provided new information for the development of activities of postnatal wards nationally and internationally. The acquired information can also be used for training the nursing personnel and for the activities done for the benefit of families with a newborn child outside postnatal wards. The quality measurer used in the study was appropriate for quality measurements in both countries. Work at this study gave birth to several new ideas for further research in the areas of client-centred quality as well as healthcare economy.

Keywords: Quality of care, client, mother, father, nursing personnel, postnatal ward, comparative study