



Understanding patient experience with elective Caesarean Section – an exploratory mixed method study utilising patient shadowing



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Introduction:

Patient experience (PE) during elective LSCS is a core part of patient centred care (PCC). Although there is no agreed definition of PCC, it encompasses the theory and practice of caring for patients and their families in ways that are meaningful and valuable to them. Although there has been an increasing drive for better understanding of PE, and more meaningful patient involvement in service design and improvement, efforts have sometimes failed to acknowledge the depth of these experiences. Furthermore, recent research is in agreement and demonstrates that patient-centredness is poorly studied by conventional research methods. Patient shadowing (PS) method of qualitative research that has been recently proposed as a research method for PCC. Purpose of this exploratory study: to utilise PS and gain better understanding of PE on the day of EI LSCS in a tertiary maternal hospital.

Methods:

- An ethnographic method of qualitative research, where investigators observe and/or interact with the study participants in their real-life environment through an event
- Shadowing Event defined as arrival at hospital car park until 30 minutes after arrival on postnatal ward
- 2nd year medical students (pre-clinical years) recruited as Shadowers
- 40 patients approached, 34 patients consented to being shadowed, 30 patients shadowed (2 opted out on day, 2 delivered prior to event)
- Inclusion criteria; EI LSCS, English speaking, Consented
- Eligible patients identified at the Anaesthetic Pre-Assessment Clinic
- Detailed explanation and PIL. Written consent obtained morning of surgery
- Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ) checklist used to guide study reporting.
- Shadowers followed participants and recorded real-time observations, comments, questions. Also recorded touchpoints, timings spent at each touchpoint and Caregivers encountered.
- Generated 30 logbooks detailing patient experiences recorded in patients’ own words.
- Subjected to Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke’s Steps) coded by hand
- **6 Themes and 9 Subthemes** emerged based on recurring sentiments or events coded for within transcripts

Themes	Subthemes
1. Patient-Staff Communication	1a) Importance of appropriate staff introductions and explanations of roles
	1b) Information Sharing
	1c) Importance of Patients Feeling listened to/included in care
2. Delays	2a) Delays/Wait Times; a source of stress and a breakdown in communication
3. Emotions and Emotional Support	3a) Anxiety and Reassurance
4. Quality of Care	4a) A Person-Centered Approach
	4b) Competent and skilful staff
5. Environment	6a) A Comfortable Environmental
6. Facilities	6a) Car Parking

Results:

Patient-Staff Communication

There were two people that I didn’t even know what they were doing- sticking things on me etcetera.”

“I like having a say about my body”

Waiting Times / Delays; A Source of Stress and Communication Breakdown

“The experience could have been improved by prior communication about expected surgery time so as to know what to expect.”

Emotions and Emotional Support

“I kind of expected what she said, but she made me feel less anxious and said I could hold her hand [during the spinal], which made me feel better”

Quality of Care

“I’ve felt like I’m in very capable hands.”

Environment

“It really does feel like a hospital up here “

Facilities / Car Park

Discussion & Conclusions:

- Results of this study reflected those in National Maternity Experience Survey 2019 in Ireland which demonstrated gaps in care, highlighting a lack of communication and empathy from healthcare providers.
- Our study had the advantage of reflecting contemporaneous, real-time feedback rather than retrospective musings as might be obtained from survey data which may be subject to biases (recall, report, positive/adverse outcome).
- Our study allowed for insight into patients’ perceptions of care experience beyond the assumed experience
- Accurately map the events that make up pathway of EI LSCS
- Discover aspects of experience that patients value and highlight opportunities for future improvements/interventions.
- Findings contribute to the literature by illuminating what patients perceive as salient to their experience of healthcare and where healthcare workers may improve in their interactions with patients
- Highlight opportunities for improvement to senior leadership to inform future service development and facilitate more patient-focussed care pathway designs
- To our knowledge, no previous study has utilised this method for obstetric patients undergoing EI LSCS.

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