Socioeconomic Status Independently Affects HCAHPS Scores

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BACKGROUND: The Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) is a nationally reported survey of patients’ perspectives of hospital care that is used for hospital comparison and reimbursement. Although the survey attempts to correct for many factors that may affect scoring, socioeconomic factors are not considered in score weighting. The purpose of this study was to analyze the effects of socioeconomic status on HCAHPS scores.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: HCAHPS scores from 15,789 patients were collected. All patients were seen at a single academic medical center from 2010-2014, thus controlling for quality of care. HCAHPS Top Box scores were then compared to patient socioeconomic status based on the median income of the zip code for each patient.

RESULTS: Median income was negatively associated with patients’ overall hospital rating (p<0.001) and willingness to recommend hospital (p<0.001). When controlling for the current adjustment factors (age, education, primary language, health status, and emergency admission), living in a zip code with a median household income above $100,000 per year was independently associated with worse Top Box Scores for the categories of “Recommend Hospital” (p=0.010), “Pain Management” (0.048), “Communication about Medicine” (p=0.007), “Cleanliness of Hospital” (p=0.003), and “Quietness of Hospital ” (p<0.001).

CONCLUSION: Socioeconomic status independently affects HCAHPS scores despite the fact that it is not considered when adjusting scores for demographic differences. This is of great consequence, as the HCAHPS scoring system is used to compare and monetarily reward hospitals with drastically different patient populations.