



Impact of Response Rate on HCAHPS Dimension Scores

Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) performance continues to be an important tool for gauging patient experience. Hospitals strive to achieve high scores in order to improve overall patient experience and maximize returns in the Hospital Value-Based Purchasing (VBP) program. Just as consumers look to online reviews before major purchases, patients now review websites for ratings when selecting a healthcare provider. It is imperative that hospitals **accurately capture their patient experience** performance in order to maintain favorable scores and remain relevant in the quickly-changing healthcare marketplace.

Recent research suggests that increasing the response rate may be one way to improve a hospital's score, as a strong correlation exists between response rate and HCAHPS scores.

Findings

In response to an article published by the Hospital Quality Institute (HQI), California HCAHPS Improvers Playbook, PRC researched their claim of a relationship between the response rate and HCAHPS top-box scores. In the article, HQI observed, "Each 1-percentage-point increase in a hospital's HCAHPS response rate is expected to result in a 0.5-percentage-point increase in the mean top-box score." Utilizing the July 2016 – June 2017 data from Hospital Compare, PRC replicated this analysis and identified a similar positive correlation between HCAHPS scores and response rates for hospitals.

CMS HCAHPS (Based on data from July 2016 – June 2017)	Correlation with Response Rate (All Hospitals)
Responsiveness of Staff	0.506
Overall Rating	0.501
Nurses Communication	0.478
Likelihood to Recommend	0.459
Care Transition	0.438
Discharge Information	0.425
Doctors Communication	0.410
Cleanliness	0.389
Communication About Medications	0.378
Quiet	0.310

The correlation value is a number between -1 and 1. A positive relationship, being a number between 0 and 1, indicates that when one variable has a higher score, the other measure will increase as well. Conversely, a negative relationship, between -1 and 0, indicates that when one variable has a higher score, the other measure tends to decrease.

As noted in the table, the HCAHPS Score/Response Rate correlations show a positive relationship across every HCAHPS dimension. In general, a positive value between 0.30 and 0.70 is considered to be a moderate positive relationship, while a positive value below a 0.30 is considered to be a weak relationship. All correlation values in PRC's study fall in the moderate positive correlation category, with the strongest relationships observed for the Responsiveness of Staff and Overall Rating questions.

Response Rate Impact

Do these values seem surprising? They should; when a sample group truly represents the total population, this correlation would be unlikely. Instead, this correlation implies that organizations' data may not reflect a true representative sample. The key to getting a more representative sample is **not** administering more surveys, but rather increasing your response rate to generate more completed surveys from the sample group selected. **With increased response rate, hospitals receive valuable feedback from a higher proportion of patients**, creating a more representative sample of the total hospital patient population.

In any survey, you are most likely to receive feedback from those patients who were either extremely happy or unhappy with their experience. Responses from a larger percentage of patients (i.e. higher response rate) insures that feedback is also received from those patients in the middle who were satisfied with their experience, but not falling to the extreme on either end of the spectrum. Therefore, the broader range of patient responses allows for a more balanced representation of the true patient population at a facility.

These findings suggest that there is a real value in increasing response rates. Higher response rates will give hospitals a more representative sample, allowing them to capture a more accurate, and generally more positive, measure of patient experience.

Conversely, a **low response rate can negatively impact a hospital's HCAHPS scores**. With a low response rate, it may be difficult to rely on patient experience scores to show when improvements have been effective. In these cases, the hospital may not be getting enough responses to accurately showcase efforts made by the hospital staff. In addition to the misrepresentation of publicly reported patient care, this can also have a negative impact on hospital staff. Morale can decline as staff members question their initiative efforts, when the challenge may actually rest in obtaining a representative sample to rate their patient experience accurately.

Key Take-Aways

- Utilizing CMS HCAHPS published data, PRC was able to identify and replicate the correlation between response rate and HCAHPS scores nationwide, first published by HQI.
- This correlation implies that increasing response rates can result in improved HCAHPS dimension scores.
- Responses from a more representative sample are key to capturing higher patient scores.



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