

ORIGINAL PAPER

Cross-national diagnostic analysis of patient empowerment in England and Greece

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Abstract

Background: Different NHS patient empowerment policies have been adopted in England and Greece; the voluntary sector development and its influence also differ. Although various aspects of patient empowerment have been explored in England, the patient empowerment systems' application is under-researched. In Greece, the few relevant attempts looking at patients' experiences focus on patient satisfaction, with only one study exploring the public hospitals managers' perspectives on user involvement. However, patient empowerment questions may be similar in both countries.

Aims and Objectives: The study aimed to explore and compare the general patient empowerment settings in the two countries, with main objectives to:

- a. identify and explore the relationships of national voluntary and governmental organisations,
- b. explore the cross-national challenges and facilitators, and make cross-national recommendations.

Methodology: This is a cross-national comparative research study. A 'diagnostic analysis' approach, an assessment of potential and actual barriers and facilitators, including the context and potential change, was chosen. The methods used were:-

- a. a network analysis of national voluntary and governmental organisations;
- b. semi-structured interviews with key representatives of these, and
- c. documentary analysis.

Results: The network analysis revealed the potential of English organisations to influence more people, with extensive memberships and stronger interrelationship between them than the Greek organisations. Different levels of awareness, knowledge and perceptions of application of the national patient empowerment policies, systems and mechanisms were identified; being generally good in England, limited in Greece. Variable general information provision, with good verbal information in England, and limited, written and verbal, information in Greece was also identified. Although the commonest cross-national perceived challenges were organisational, the Greek culture, professional systems and attitudes were also challenges in Greece. National relevant policies and professional attitudes in England, and integrated working in Greece were perceived facilitators. Changes in professional attitudes and cultures, information awareness / provision, and national drivers were common cross-national facilitators. Greek participants called for better function of patient empowerment systems within hospitals; while hearing the patients 'voice' and non-tokenism were highlighted in England.

Conclusions: Notwithstanding its limitations, this analysis identified factors and complexities likely to influence patient empowerment change. The influence of the voluntary sector and well-developed policies in England was evident, while in Greece there was lack of knowledge and awareness. Nonetheless, it seems that the need for better non-tokenistic systems is cross-national.

Keywords: patient empowerment, England, Greece, cross-national comparative study, patient involvement, patients' rights, diagnostic analysis, network analysis