

Nurse and Physiotherapist Practitioners Leading the Way in Emergency Care: The Creation of a Minor Injuries and Illness Unit.

Wendy Fenton, MN (NP)¹

¹ Emergency Department, Wollongong Hospital, NSW.

This presentation will discuss the creation of a Minor Injuries and Illness Unit (MIIU), which is lead by Nurse and Physio Practitioners. It will highlight the advantages of a multidisciplinary approach to emergency care.

During the winter period of 2012 there was a 13% increase in the number of presentations to the Emergency Department (ED) of Wollongong Hospital, resulting in significant overcrowding of the Fast Track (FT) of the ED with multiple constraints restricting patient flow. Overcrowding combined with the implementation of the National Emergency Access Targets (NEAT) highlighted a need to optimise flow of patients through ED.

Increased length of stay (LOS) and overcrowding in ED is recognised as a national problem and has been shown to worsen patient outcomes (Aronsky & Hoot, 2008). Optimising patient flow by 'streaming' patients to the most appropriate area in ED for their current clinical needs decreases the LOS and positively impacts on overcrowding. (Bassham, Ben-tovim & King, 2006).

To implement the streaming and NEAT strategies and address the issues of overcrowding a MIIU was developed in Wollongong ED and opened in January 2013. The unit is staffed by a Nurse Practitioner (NP) and a Physiotherapist Practitioner (PP). The aim of the project was to decrease the average length of stay (ALOS) by 10% and to improve the NEAT target by 10% over 6 months for patients that present with minor injuries and illness to the ED of Wollongong Hospital. Since opening, all national standards for LOS and NEAT targets for this patient cohort have been met, and the targets of 10% improvement in NEAT and ALOS have been surpassed.

The MIIU provides the most appropriate setting to deliver the best possible health outcomes for a particular cohort of patients. It promotes and enhances the skills of the NP's and PP's, supporting collaborative practice and effective team work, and encourages mutual respect across disciplines.

References

Aronsky, D & Hoot, N, 2008, 'Systematic Review of Emergency Department Crowding: Causes, Effects and Solutions', *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, Vol.52, no.2, pp126-136.

Bassham, J, Ben-Tovim, D, & King, D, 2006, 'Redesigning emergency department patient flows: Application of Lean Thinking to health care', *Emergency Medicine Australasia*, Vol. 18, Issue 4, pp391-397.