

Emergency nurses' knowledge and self-rated practice skills when caring for older ED patients

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Background:

Older adults are high users of emergency department (ED) services and represent the fastest growth in ED presentations. Their care provision can present challenges for emergency nurses due to atypical clinical presentations, complex co-morbid health conditions and an environment not conducive to recommended care practices. There are evidence-based models of care demonstrated as being beneficial for older patients. The challenge for emergency nurses is operationalising these in the complex ED environment. This study sought to assess emergency nurses' knowledge and self-rated practice assessment skills when caring for older patients in the ED.

Methods:

A quantitative cross-sectional survey of emergency nurses (n=101) from three EDs across metropolitan Victoria.

Results:

Knowledge scores were not significantly different based on designation, years qualified as a Registered Nurse/Enrolled Nurse, or length of time working in emergency nursing. Mean scores were 12.7 for the 25-item Facts on Aging Quiz and 8.1 for the 14-item knowledge questions. From the self-rated practice assessment, >80% of participants rated themselves as either 'good' or 'very good' in three categories (assessing pain; identifying delirium; identifying dementia). In five categories, <70% rated themselves as either 'good' or 'very good'. Categories with the lowest ratings (<60%) included: identifying depression and assessing polypharmacy.

Conclusions:

The findings highlighted a deficit in gerontic self-rated knowledge among emergency nurses, but variability in their self-assessments of practice. Knowledge may be improved by an education program targeted towards meeting needs of older ED users in a complex environment, however further research is needed to understand current emergency care practices for older people.

Implications:

Emergency nurses provide care for large numbers of older ED users in a difficult environment. The findings have implications for development and implementation of initiatives to improve ED care for older patients and further assessment of their impact on care delivery for all ED users.

Key words:

Emergency nurses, older adults, care provision, knowledge, self-rated assessment