

Transdisciplinary care in the emergency department: improving patient outcomes

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Background

Many strategies have been introduced to address the growing service demand on EDs. One such approach is a transdisciplinary care model, which has been introduced in the two EDs of a Victorian health service. Transdisciplinary teams are a unique way of drawing together the skills of different disciplines. Members of the team share knowledge, skills and responsibilities, completing training in other disciplines, which allows flexibility in workload. This transdisciplinary care model allows a single member of the team to autonomously assess and manage a wide variety of patient presentations, thereby expediting patient flow through the ED.

Aims

This study aimed to critically evaluate the outcomes of the transdisciplinary model of care, including: patient length of stay in the ED, hospital admission rates, and patient perceptions of the care model.

Methods

A mixed method approach was used to evaluate the outcomes of the transdisciplinary model of care. A retrospective audit of medical histories ($n = 200$) was undertaken. Data extracted from the medical histories were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, and compared with a matched control group.

Eleven in-depth interviews were undertaken with patients and carers who had received the services of the transdisciplinary team in 2012. Separate focus groups were conducted with ED staff and with transdisciplinary team staff. The interview and focus group transcripts were thematically analysed.

Results and Conclusion

This study has identified important positive outcomes arising from the transdisciplinary model of care in the ED. Patients and carers were “incredibly impressed with the care” they received from the transdisciplinary team. Importantly for the hospital, the transdisciplinary model resulted in a reduced rate of hospital admission ($n = 27$, 18%) when compared to the control group ($n = 19$, 38%, $p = 0.005$), and low unscheduled re-presentation rates ($n = 4$, 2.7%). Despite the comprehensive care delivered, patients who received the services of the transdisciplinary team did not stay longer in the ED than other patients.