

Triage in the Emergency Department, Hazards and Vulnerabilities: a National Perspective.

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Aim: To identify which risks and vulnerabilities in the triage process were most hazardous by evaluating emergency nurses' perceptions of their probabilities and severities.

Methods: An inventory was developed guided by the findings of a previous field study which identified vulnerabilities in the triage process. The inventory comprised of three domains: i) patient flow and emergency department service delivery, ii) communication and teamwork, and iii) the competence of the triage nurse. The inventory assessed the probability and severity of 27 vulnerabilities by surveying emergency nurses' perceptions of these risks to identify the most vulnerable areas.

Results: With a response rate of 41.5%, this study identified that the area of greatest risk to both patients and the efficiency of the ED related to "patient flow and care delivery in the ED". ED overcrowding, access block, hospital overcrowding, prolonged waiting times, multiple patients arriving simultaneously, triage queuing and use of overflow areas were the vulnerabilities perceived as the most hazardous.

Conclusion: ED overcrowding and the issues that surround hospital overcrowding and access block are not new issues, they are also not issues that will be easily overcome. To reduce the impact of these issues on the triage process and in turn the whole ED system initiatives and improvements need to be made that focus on managing these system wide problems.

Key Words: Triage, Risks, Patient Safety