

# **A mixed method analysis of emergency department staff towards patients who present with deliberate self-poisoning**

Catherine Martin<sup>1</sup>, Asheq Rahman<sup>2</sup>, **Rose Chapman**<sup>3</sup>

1 Monash Health/Australian Catholic University, 135 David Street, Dandenong, Vic, 3175, email: cathy.martin@monashhealth.org.au

2 Monash Health/Australian Catholic University, 135 David Street, Dandenong, Vic, 3175, email: asheq.rahman@monashhealth.org.au

3 Monash Health/Australian Catholic University, 135 David Street, Dandenong, Vic, 3175, email: rose.chapman@southernhealth.org.au

## **Abstract**

Patients presenting to the emergency department with deliberate self-poisoning have reported negative staff attitude, which may influence their decision to leave prior to treatment and may determine whether they seek medical help in the future.

The aim of this study was to assess the attitude of medical and nursing staff towards patients who present to the emergency department with deliberate self-poisoning using revised Attitudes towards Deliberate Self-Harm Questionnaire. Two open ended questions were added asking staff to write their perceptions and stories about patients who deliberate self-poison. The questionnaire was distributed to all nurses and doctors from three emergency departments in one Victorian hospital network. Linear regression was used to assess the strength of linear relationships between the questionnaire total and each of its factor scores. The two open questions were analysed using qualitative data analysis.

Forty five percent of 410 staff returned the questionnaire. The analysis of the total questionnaire score suggested the attitude of emergency nurses and doctors was positive towards patients who deliberately self-poison. Doctors had significantly higher total and Factor 2 ‘dealing effectively with the deliberate self-poisoning patient’ scores than nurses. After adjusting for length of time working in the emergency department Factor 2 ‘dealing effectively with the deliberate self-poisoning patient’ remained statistically significant. From the open-ended questions staff reported feelings of empathy and/or frustration, particularly towards patients who represent. Many said they lacked skills and confidence to effectively manage these patients. Three themes emerged from the qualitative data *depends on the patient, treat everyone the same, and skills and confidence to manage these patients.*

To ensure best practice when caring for patients following deliberate self-poisoning health networks are required to provide emergency staff with specialist support, knowledge, skills, and guidelines to provide effective care for this vulnerable population.