

# **An innovative new role in the emergency department: forging best practice in refugee care**

Jacquie McBride<sup>1</sup>, Rose Chapman<sup>2</sup>, Andrew Block<sup>1</sup>, and Lisa Cox<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Monash Health, 122 Thomas Street, Dandenong, Victoria, 3175

<sup>2</sup> Monash Health Emergency Departments and Australian Catholic University

**Background and Purpose/Objective:** Refugees and asylum seekers experience significant and complex health needs. However, evidence indicates that this population are often disengaged from primary care services, and rely on hospital emergency departments for health care. Over representation of refugees in hospital is highly problematic, for both the individual and the service sector. In 2013, Monash Health established a Refugee Health Nurse Liaison position within the Emergency Department at Dandenong Hospital. This innovative position was implemented to improve client outcomes by enhancing integrated care within and across hospital and community sectors, thus reducing inappropriate emergency department presentations and avoidable hospital admissions. This paper will present the 12-month evaluation of the role.

**Methodology:** A mixed methods approach was employed to evaluate the role, including the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. Data were analysed as an aggregate to provide comprehensive insight into the 12-month period, and enable recommendations for future action.

## **Results/Impacts/Outcomes:**

Results have shown that approximately 11% of patients presenting to the Emergency Department were from refugee source countries. 946 patients were referred to the role, with the majority generated from Emergency Department (78%), followed by Mental Health (8.3%). All patients received an assessment of physical, mental and social health status, and were provided with information to support health literacy development. Referrals were made as required, predominantly to refugee health nurses, GP's, and mental health services. Analysis of case studies and feedback suggest that the role is effective in contributing to improved patient experience and coordination of care.

## **Conclusions and Discussion:**

The Refugee Health Nurse Liaison position is effective in addressing issues related to access and equity of care, quality of care, and care coordination for asylum seekers and refugees. This has included strengthened relationships between primary care and acute sectors, lending to improved models of care for patients.