

Meeting the challenge: Schoolies and the On Site Health Tent

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Background:

Delivering safe and cost-effective health care to a prolonged mass community event of underage school-leavers offer healthcare providers some unique challenges. 'Schoolies' on the Gold Coast of Queensland is one such event which has received much publicity and evoked significant parental and community concern. It has required the development and refinement of a unique physical set-up, coupled with a very specific inter-service staffing mix. This set-up has been developed over several years to offer, for 1-2 weeks/year, a high throughput, safe and effective patient care in a community setting. However there is limited systematic evidence to document its effectiveness.

Aims:

This paper will describe the onsite treatment facility, designed to manage the large underage population influx each Schoolies period. Initial Queensland Ambulance Service/ Department of Communities data collection suggests that in 2013 around 700 of more than 25,000 schoolies were triaged through the treatment tent, with most managed onsite and some requiring transport to the Emergency Department (ED). This patient load was managed with minimal onsite staff, including approximately 4 QAS staff, 2 triage competent ED nurses and 2 ED doctors.

This paper will also describe and justify the rationale for a proposed formal study designed to evaluate the impact of the on site health tent on patient and health service delivery outcomes. This research will provide an evidence-based understanding of practice delivery and outcomes for this unique population group (schoolies) as well as other large community events that occur around Australia where there is a transient increase in the local population and associated potential health care needs.

Key words: ambulance, school leavers, treatment tent, emergency department