

The role of family and carers acute pain management for the cognitively impaired older persons: A qualitative study

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Background

On arrival to the emergency department many older persons are accompanied by family/carers. Yet the role of family/carers in the emergency department is unclear. We know very little about how emergency department nurses balance care practices to accommodate family/carers while specifically meeting the needs of cognitively impaired older persons experiencing acute pain.

Objectives

The primary aim of this paper was to understand emergency nurses' perceptions of the role of family/carers in acute pain management care activities for the older cognitively impaired person.

Design

Emergency nurses were invited to participate in focus group interviews. A semi-structured interview tool was developed from the literature and comprised open-ended questions and three Likert scale items which assisted to focus nurses' thoughts on their perceived role of family/carers in the emergency department.

Settings

The study was undertaken across four emergency department sites in Sydney, Australia and included two district hospitals and two tertiary referral hospitals.

Participants

Emergency nurses were invited to participate in one, face to face, focus group interview. Purposive sampling was used and inclusion criteria included at least one year emergency department experience.

Methods

Interview data were analysed and organised thematically. Two expert qualitative researchers independently reviewed transcripts and emerging coding and interpretation.

Results

Eighty nurses participated in 16 focus groups across four hospitals. Participating nurses included 67 (84%) females and 13 (16%) males with 8.6 years (mean; SD+/- 8.64). Nurses had an average of 12.5 years as a Registered Nurse (SD+/-10.06) and 8.6 years (SD+/- 8.64) emergency experience. Five key themes emerged from the analysis; i) building an accurate clinical picture; ii) a calming hidden workforce; iii) Family/carers as barriers to pain management care iv) Delivering analgesia - a balancing act; and v) lack of pain assessment tools for the cognitively impaired older person.

Conclusions

The study has provided insight into the role of family/carers as perceived by emergency nurses. There were many benefits in partnering with family/carers when information gathering on the older cognitively impaired person in pain. Family/carers are sensitive to health behaviour changes of older cognitively impaired people, which can assist nurses to optimise pain management.