

Meeting Patient Expectations in the Emergency Department: Preliminary Findings from the Preparing Emergency Patients and Providers Study

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Introduction

Effective communication to develop a shared understanding of patient expectations is critical in establishing a positive encounter in the emergency department (ED). However, there is limited research examining patient expectations in the ED, and their impact on the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours during and after an ED visit. The objective of this study is to examine patient expectations in the ED.

Methods

As a part of a larger 3-phase study, a paper-based questionnaire on ED expectations was distributed to all patients who presented to one of four EDs in Nova Scotia with a Canadian Triage and Acuity Scale (CTAS) score of 2 to 5. A follow-up survey was distributed to all willing participants via email to determine their satisfaction with care received in ED. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze responses.

Results

Phase 1 was conducted from January to September 2016. In total, 24,788 expectation questionnaires were distributed, 11,571 were collected (47% response rate), and 509 patients were contacted for a follow-up survey. Preliminary analysis of 4,533 questionnaires shows the majority of patients (67.1%) made the decision by themselves to present to the ED, while others were advised by a family/friend (22%). Respondents were most worried about an injury (17.8%) followed by illness (15.6%) and expected to talk to a physician (69.9%). The majority of physicians (53.3%) reported the questionnaire helped in caring for the patient and 87.5% felt they met patient expectations. There were 147 responses to a follow-up survey (29% response rate) and 87.1% of responders reported that ED clinicians met their expectations.

Conclusion

Patients have a variety of concerns and expectations when presenting to the ED. Obtaining expectations early in the patient encounter may provide opportunities for improved communication between clinicians and patients while enhancing satisfaction. Further analysis is needed to determine the impact of the questionnaire on ED productivity.