How Does Access To Primary Health Care Services Influence Utilization Of Emergency Departments?

Preliminary Findings From The Preparing Emergency Patients And Providers (PrEPP) Study

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BACKGROUND

Primary care and emergency care services are vital components of the Canadian health care system.1 Many Canadians visit the emergency department (ED) with non-urgent medical issues that may be more appropriately managed in a primary care setting.2,3 Others are referred to the ED due to the urgency of their health concern.1-3 There is limited research examining how access to primary care services influences a patient’s decision to visit an ED.

METHODS

As part of a larger study on ED patient expectations, a 7-item, paper-based questionnaire is being distributed to all patients with a CTAS score of 2 to 5 who presented to four EDs in Nova Scotia between January 2016-May 2016 (n=490):

• QEII Health Sciences Centre
• IWK Health Centre
• Cobequid Community Health Centre
• Dartmouth General

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the first question of the PrEPP questionnaire:

"Who/what helped you make the decision to come in today?"

RESULTS

Preliminary analyses show that primary health care services and providers can influence patient decisions to attend the ED.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revised</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By myself</td>
<td>Referral by specialist</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral by ED staff</td>
<td>Referral by walk-in</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>Other</td>
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CONCLUSIONS

Preliminary analyses show that primary health care services and providers can influence patient decisions to attend the ED. This research highlights some of the linkages between PC services and EDs:

• Patients are being referred to EDs by primary care services.
• Some patients are accessing EDs due to an inability to access timely care.
• ED patients that are unable to see family physician are seeking medical interventions that could also be provided by primary care services.
• Many patients decide to visit the ED by themselves. Further investigation is needed to determine if their needs could be more appropriately met prior to visiting the ED.

This descriptive research is an important first step in identifying opportunities to optimize emergency care and primary care services in Nova Scotia.

References