

Improving communication with patients and visitors in the emergency department

Overview

Enhanced communication with patients and visitors about their care and hospital processes has been shown to significantly improve patient experiences. Recent evidence suggests that improving a patient's knowledge and understanding of their hospital journey can reduce the risk of violent and aggressive behaviour in hospitals. Simple tools such as information signage, patient brochures and environmental design factors can be used to enhance patients' knowledge, experience and expectations.

Improving hospitals' communication with patients and visitors was recommended as a strategy to improve violence prevention by the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee of Parliament following the *Inquiry into Violence and Security Arrangements in Victorian Hospitals*.

Key Initiatives

This report describes key initiatives (funded by the Department of Health and Human Services) focussed on improving hospital communication with patients and visitors. The initiatives were conducted by Ballarat Health Services (BHS) as part of a project funded in 2014-15, and by the Department's *Improving the Patient Experience Program* in 2006.

These initiatives focus on communicating expected standards of behaviour of patients, visitors and staff, information about hospital processes that patients will encounter and alternative sources of care for non-critical emergency department (ED) patients.

Patient information brochures

The Department's "Welcome to the Emergency Department" patient information brochure is currently available for use in all Victorian EDs. It provides patients with information about the key stages in an ED

patient's care. A complimentary DVD was also developed for use in the ED waiting room. The brochure is available at:

www.health.vic.gov.au/emergency-care/improving.htm

BHS developed and implemented their own patient information brochure using consumer focused language that provides patients with information about what to expect in the ED. Key stages of a patient's care in the ED including the processes of triage, reception, assessment, treatment, admission and discharge are addressed. Other key areas include the impact of ambulance arrivals on waiting times, expected standards of behaviour, and medical history information. The brochure was validated through consumer consultation.

Patient journey signage

To keep patients informed about the processes they will encounter as an ED patient, BHS is developing signage that provides a description of what to expect in each ED treatment area and acute wards. A patient experience process map is also being developed. Similar signage used in the United Kingdom's National Health Service has shown good results in improving the patient experience.

ED waiting room video clip

A video clip has been developed by BHS describing the experience and hospital journey of three patients in the ED. Thought bubbles are used to communicate their experiences of waiting, personal concerns and frustrations. The video will be launched by BHS by mid 2015 and will be available on the BHS website.

Communicating likely waiting times

BHS is developing a system that will provide waiting ED patients with an indication of how busy the ED is at any point in time. The algorithm used to determine how busy the ED is will utilise ED capacity, demand and

patient acuity in its calculation. The system will be trialled in early 2015.

'Find a General Practitioner (GP)' help desk

BHS partnered with the Grampians Medicare Local (GML) to provide ED patients with a touch screen and GP-linked telephone to locate and contact GPs in the local area for non-critical care provision. The GML provides BHS with ongoing up-to-date GP information such as opening hours and availability of appointments. A complementary wall sticker provides information on why and how to use the 'Find a GP' Help Desk.

Information on the GP helpdesk is included in the patient information brochure and is regularly provided by volunteers in the ED waiting room. The following link provides a demonstration of the 'Find a GP' Help Desk:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tx17IQacjUc&list=UUzDzylqjF3Ks6dfDMrRDQWQ>

Volunteers in the ED

Volunteers can play an important role in supporting patients and their carers in the ED. The Department's guidelines for volunteers in the ED were produced to assist Victoria's health services to develop and operate volunteer programs in their EDs that reflect good practice and suit the local context. Their purpose is to support the delivery of high-quality volunteer programs in Victorian EDs, and to promote a greater consistency in programs across the state.

The guidelines describe:

- key principles that should underpin the delivery of ED volunteer programs
- roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders
- good practice guidance on specific components of a volunteer program delivery.

The guidelines are available at:

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/emergency-care/improving.htm>

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