

2010

What emergency nurses consider the reasons possible primary care patients present to an Emergency Department for treatment

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Recommended Citation

Middleton, Rebekkah, What emergency nurses consider the reasons possible primary care patients present to an Emergency Department for treatment, Master of Nursing (Research) thesis, School of Nursing, Midwifery & Indigenous Health - Faculty of Health & Behavioural Sciences, University of Wollongong, 2010. <https://ro.uow.edu.au/theses/3153>

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What emergency nurses consider the reasons
possible primary care patients present to an
Emergency Department for treatment

A thesis submitted in (partial) fulfilment of the requirements for the award
of the degree

Master of Nursing (Research)

from

University of Wollongong

by

Rebekkah Middleton, BN

Faculty of Health & Behavioural Science

2010

I, Rebekkah Jane Middleton, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Nursing (Research), in the School of Nursing, Midwifery & Indigenous Health in the Faculty of Health & Behavioural Sciences, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Rebekkah Jane Middleton

1 July 2010

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Abstract

Objective: This thesis examines the opinions of emergency nurses towards the possible primary care patient. It aims to explore what emergency nurses consider the reasons possible primary care patients present to an Emergency Department for treatment. This thesis also compares these nursing perceptions to those of patients.

Background: Literature speaks of health professionals' opinions towards patients who present to an Emergency Department who could potentially be seen by a General Practitioner or Medical Centre. This patient population are termed 'possible primary care patients' in this research. There is no literature that discusses nurses specifically and how nurses view the intention of this group of patients for presentation to an Emergency Department. With this in mind and with an interest in Emergency Departments and in particular emergency nurses, the researcher chose to focus on the beliefs of emergency nurses working in Emergency Departments within the former Illawarra Health Service towards primary care patients. For the purpose of the research, the patient population being examined were the possible primary care patients identified by the following criteria: any patient given a triage category 4 or 5 who self-presents, is not a planned return visit, and is unlikely to be admitted according to the Triage nurse assessing the patient.

Methods: Nursing staff working in the five Emergency Departments within the former Illawarra Area Health Service were given questionnaires to ascertain their perceptions of the reasons possible primary care patients present to an Emergency Department for care. Data were also collected about their department, sex, age, position held in the department, and length of time the nursing staff member had been working in an Emergency Department. These data were analysed to determine any differences in perception based on these variables.

Findings: Four key themes emerged from the data analysis. These were: despite demography, nurses generally considered free service provision to be the leading reason that possible primary care patients choose an Emergency Department for care; nurses holding positions of advanced practice or management did not consider cost to be an overwhelming factor for possible primary care patients when choosing

to come to an Emergency Department when compared with nurses working as Registered Nurse (RN) or Enrolled Nurse (EN); rural nurses consider access to General Practitioners to be lacking; and nurses and patients have polar views of why possible primary care patients come to an Emergency Department for service delivery.

Conclusions: Emergency nurses consistently believe that possible primary care patients choose to present to an Emergency Department because it is a free service. This agreement occurs despite various demographic differences.

There were evidenced differences regarding reasons for presentation to an Emergency Department between nurses and presenting patients. Nurses focused on free delivery of medical care and lack of access to General Practitioner services. Patients however focused on the urgency of their illness/injury believing it needed immediate care.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for the help, support and encouragement in completing this thesis as part of my Masters in Nursing (Research).

- Patrick Crookes – primary supervisor
- Ken Walsh – second supervisor
- My husband Mark for his ongoing faith, patience, encouragement and support throughout this journey