The organisational world of emergency clinicians

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Congratulations to Dr Peter Nugus who was awarded his PhD in December 2007 for his thesis entitled ‘The organisational world of emergency clinicians’. Peter’s PhD was conducted on a full-time basis, was funded by a Centre for Clinical Excellence Patient Safety Scholarship and was awarded by the University of New South Wales.

Supervisors

Professor Jeffrey Braithwaite (University of New South Wales)

Abstract

Aims and objectives

Emergency clinicians are responsible for rapid diagnosis and treatment, and the disposition of patients either to other hospital departments or for discharge from the ED (Emergency Department). The research aimed to reveal the unique and under-explored domain of work involved in their interactions with other emergency clinicians and with clinicians from other departments.

Methods

The thesis draws on a year’s worth of ethnographic research in the EDs of two tertiary referral hospitals in Sydney, Australia - including unstructured and structured observation, and 56 field interviews.

Findings

Emergency medicine and ED work are inherently ‘clinical-organisational’. Emergency clinicians progress patient care by intertwining time management and negotiation skills with clinical care. This allows them to collectively create a moving ‘carousel’. They simultaneously treat individual patients and fulfil the organisation’s demands by organising the care for multiple present and future patients. Emergency clinicians are taught to become
part of a clinical-organisational culture. This is especially evident in the complexity of the work of senior emergency clinicians and the way they educate junior clinicians. The pecking order of other medical and surgical specialties has a negative impact on the ability of the ED to deliver collaborative care. In response to the hospitals’ structure, emergency clinicians use their knowledge about the way the organisation works, and communication skills, to progress patient pathways.

Conclusions/ recommendations

EDs are the link between the community and the hospital. This requires recognition of and support for the unique diagnostic, interventional, organisational and educational work emergency clinicians undertake at the front door of the hospital.

Related Publications


Related Conference presentations

Nugus, P., and Braithwaite, J. How do clinicians actually deliver care to patients? Local enactments of quality in the Emergency Department, Conference of the International Society for Quality in Health Care, Copenhagen, Denmark, 19-22 October, 2008.


Current and future work

Currently Research Fellow on Action Research Interprofessional Learning Project between UNSW and ACT Health, pursuing research on EDs, integrated care, and acute care to older patients.