

Improving data capture in an ambulatory emergency care unit: the power of a patient list

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Aims

Understanding the activity of a service is vital to development and improvement of that service. At a south London ambulatory emergency care (AEC) unit, the variety of case mix and requirement for different coding processes (eg inpatient and outpatient episodes) complicated reliable activity data capture. The AEC unit had a rudimentary computer-based patient list (on Microsoft Excel) for recording patients waiting to come in from GP and emergency department referrals and ongoing actions, but this was inconsistently used. Whilst coding issues were resolved, an improved method of data capture was required.

Methods

Working with the hospital informatics department, a novel patient list was developed on the Microsoft Access database system. This allows recording of referral source, capture of time of referral and, through the selection of options for each action, reduces the variation in documentation styles. It was designed to allow multiple users to use the list at any one time, allowing receptionists to have the list open and to check whether patients are expected in the unit, and to change location details when patients arrive. A sample of patient lists from October 2013 was compared with cases seen in the month of June 2014 after improvements to the patient list.

Results

In October 2013, data on 9 days (39%) was missing from locally held records. On the remaining data for the month, there were 339 entries. 51 (15%) had no record of referral source, 106 (31%) had no record of presenting complaint or condition. No entries recorded time arrived or time seen.

In June 2014, 100% of active AEC days had a recorded patient list. 690 entries were recorded during the month. Only one had no record of referral source and only 36 (5%) had no record of presenting complaint. 84% of entries had a record of time seen in the unit.

Conclusions

A structured patient list can improve the local capture of data on AEC unit activity; a master list of all activity improves

data analysis for improvement and allows clear records for governance purposes.

Conflict of interest statement

Nil to declare. ■

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