

What do patients want? Information and communication in the Emergency Department

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Aims To understand the informational requirements of patients and their families attending the ED and to use these findings to inform future practice around information provision within the ED setting.

Background

Current research on the communication between patients and health care professionals (HCP) in the Emergency Department (ED) is limited.

Communication is central to enhancing the patient experience and is a key factor for decreasing readmissions and limiting frustration and aggressive behaviour towards staff from patients and their families

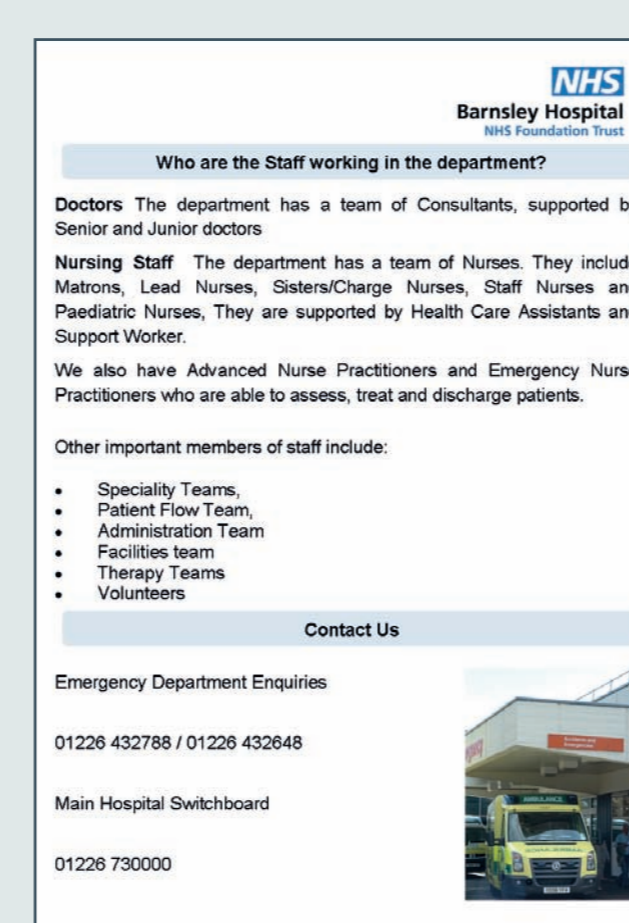
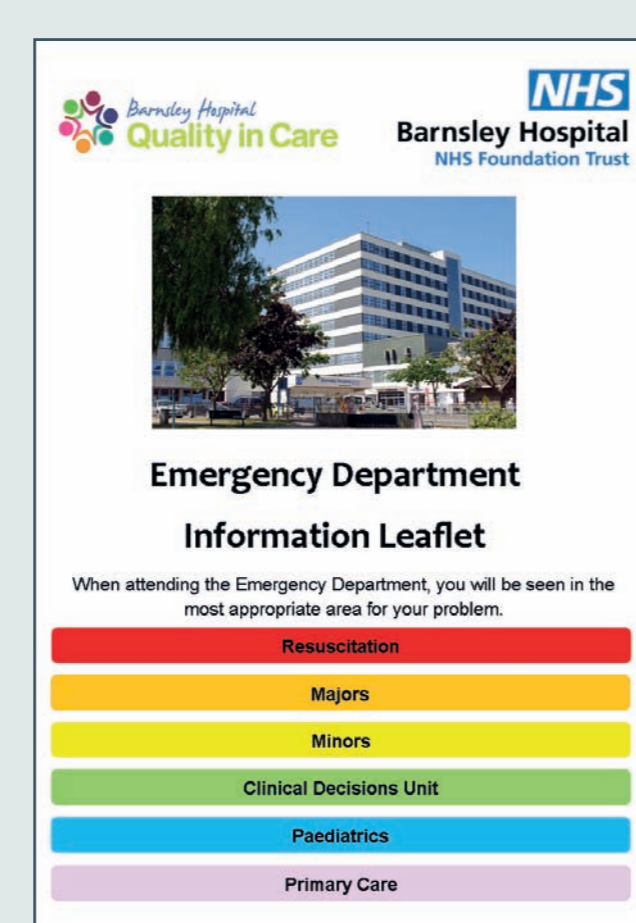
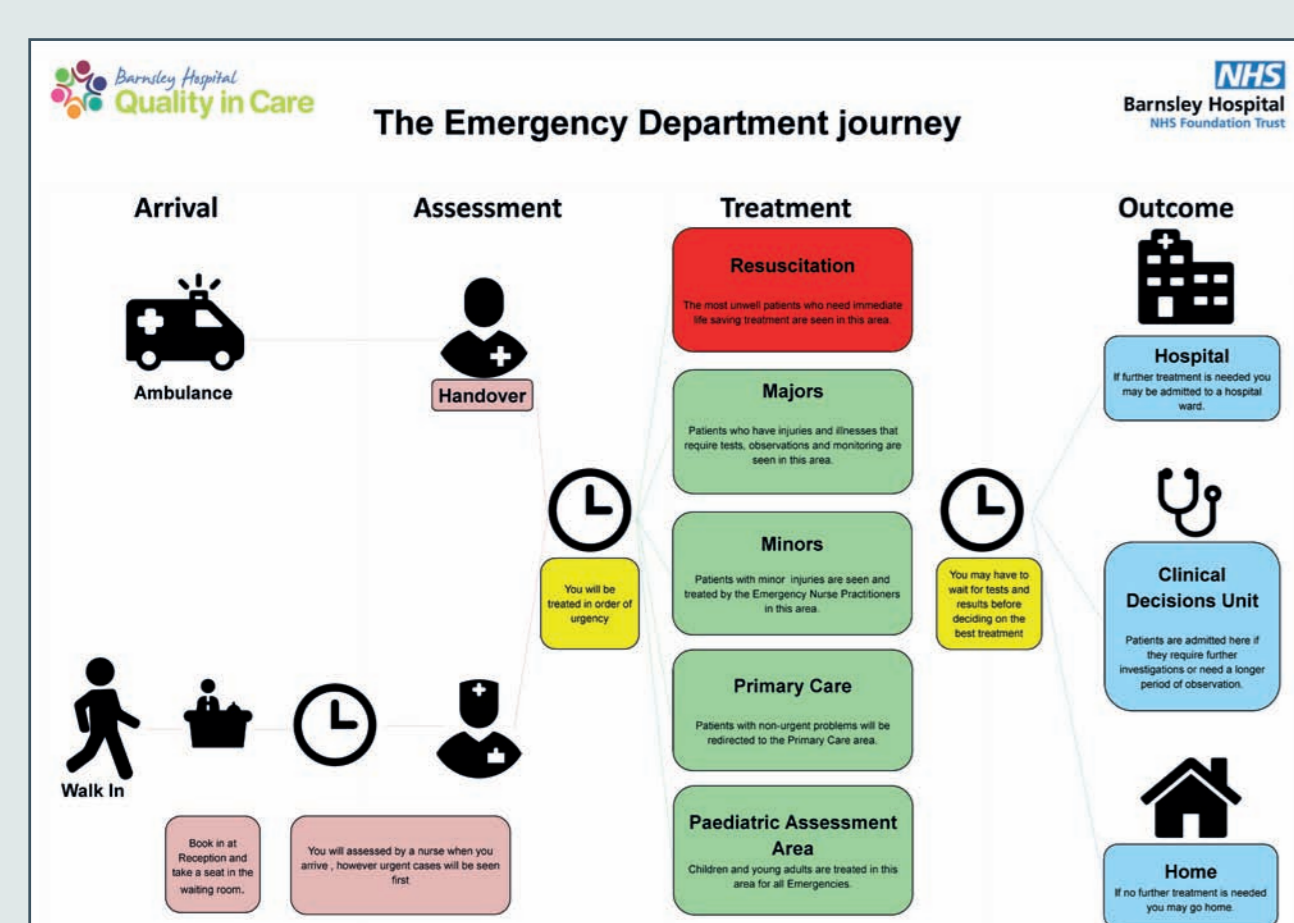
Information is fundamental to a positive patient experience and patients feeling involved in decisions about their care .

Understanding the communication in the ED between patients, their families and HCP's could facilitate an understanding of the issues encompassing the patient experience and uncover procedures and systems that could be employed to improve the mental health and well-being of patients and their families.

Method

Action Research (AR) was used to understand the experiences and requirements of communication and information exchange within the ED environment.

The perspectives of ED staff, researchers, patients and their families were brought together through individual semi-structured qualitative interviews with patients and their families, staff focus groups and patient shadowing.



Our poster and information leaflet were developed after consideration of the findings to improve communication and information exchange in the ED.

Results

Several common themes associated with information and communication in the ED emerged from the AR.

- Communication (feeling informed, how long will I have to wait),
- Explanations of treatment and care,
- Expectations of the ED
- Written Information.

Similar themes emerged from the staff focus group and identified several areas for improvement.

Patient observations demonstrated the transmission of information from HCP's to patients and assisted in identifying areas for improving patient-staff interactions.

Conclusions

Patients and staff agreed that it would be useful to have simplified information regarding ED tests and procedures.

Patients were often unaware of why they were having specific tests and it was felt this caused unnecessary anxiety.

Many patients were confused about the different health care professionals they came into contact with, as Doctors and Nurses working in the ED wear a similar type of uniform, patients were unable to distinguish between them.

Patients were often frustrated as they perceived the waiting room to be quiet at times, despite them waiting for a significant amount of time. It was felt that enabling patients to understand how the department works as a whole would increase awareness around waiting times and how busy the department was.

Technology was considered a useful tool for communicating information to patients in the ED. The use of a TV screen in the waiting room demonstrating information regarding tests and procedures, staff groups, waiting times and statistical information (for example, number of patient attendances at certain time points) was considered an important method of information giving.

"I was kind of just going with the flow a bit, but I felt like it would have been a bit more helpful if they would have explained like what's in the nebulisers and stuff so I actually knew"

Family member: "one of them could have come in and said 'are you ok Mr xxx, this is what we are waiting on, we are waiting on a doctor or whatever' nothing."

"I think that there should be patient information things that they are given when they arrive about explaining the department or some posters or something round which there should have been for years shouldn't there?"

"I wanted more information of what were happening to me"

"I think it, it's about the process you really need to know because, you know in A&E you are left for long periods aren't you? Waiting for doctors to see you, and just that information as to why, they think that you are ignoring them some patients don't they, or you have forgotten them or just that sort of information, I think would help, enormously really"