Just Waiting! An International Review of Emergency Department Complaints

Abstract

Background
In an age where a myriad of electronic devices are at our fingertips, Google provides an instant consult of self-diagnosis. Patient expectations are largely unmet and complaints readily made. In recent years, media is placing an increasing emphasis on news surrounding poor patient care in healthcare settings worldwide. Despite this, few literature reviews address complaints specific to emergency departments.

Objective
The objective of this literature review is to analyse unsolicited patient complaints within Emergency Departments worldwide with the aim to create recommendations to improve patient satisfaction in the Emergency Department.

Design and setting
An International literature review of unsolicited patient complaints specific to adult and paediatric emergency departments within the major medical databases, dating from 1987 – 2018.

Main outcome measures
Three domains: clinical, management and relationships. These are sub-divided into 7 categories and further divided into 23 sub categories, ranging from professional conduct to access block.

Results
Communication (20%), access (21%) and perception of quality of care (21%) are the most complained about factors within the emergency department. Interestingly, wait times only accounted for 1.7% of total complaints. Medical practitioners evoked the majority of complaints (39%) out of all hospital staff. Complainers were an equal distribution of gender. The highest complainant was not the patient themselves but their parent or guardian (34.7%).

Conclusion
Contrary to mainstream media, waiting times are not the major culprit in influencing patient dissatisfaction. Reduced waiting times should undoubtedly remain a goal of any emergency department. However, this literature review reveals emphasis should also be placed on: finessed communication tactics; frequency of patient contact; transparency of care and improvement of departmental patient flow in order to improve the patient's journey within the Emergency Department. Ultimately, evidence based recommendations must be pursued to address these crucial factors affecting overall patient care