

General practitioner follow-up in older people after an emergency department admission

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Background

There are few studies that investigate the behaviour of older patients regarding general practice (GP) follow-up after an emergency department (ED) admission.

Aims

We sought to measure the proportion of older patients, who were discharged from a suburban ED in South-Western Sydney with a follow-up GP instruction, who sought care within 7 days.

Method

We used ED discharge summaries and structured telephone interviews to recruit and collect discharge and GP follow-up data. Eligible participants were all patients aged 65 years and older who were discharged from Fairfield Hospital ED during a two-week period in July 2016. The data were analysed descriptively. We conducted exploratory statistical analyses to identify potential explanatory factors.

Results

Of 70 eligible patients, 50 individuals participated in the study. The majority (76%) followed-up in GP by day 7 after discharge (median 3 days). Social isolation as measured by the Lubben Social Network Scale (LSNS-6) did not appear to influence GP follow-up. 7-day GP follow-up however, appeared associated with a higher score on one item in the LSNS-6 - "How many relatives do you feel close to such that you can call on them for help?" ($p = 0.003$). Participants also appeared less likely to have followed up if they were widowed (54% vs 84%, $p = 0.055$), or didn't drive (53% vs 90%, $p = 0.051$).

Conclusion

Most participants in this study followed-up with their general practitioner by day 7 after ED discharge. Closer family ties seem to affect the likelihood of follow-up. Other factors such as immediate access to car transport may contribute and require further exploration.