



Interventions to Support Staff Caring for Pediatric Behavioral Health Patients in the Emergency Department

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Background

Emergency departments (ED) across the country continue to see increasing volumes of behavioral health (BH) patients. With this growing volume, an increased number of aggressive BH patients has also been noted.

ED staff in our large, urban pediatric hospital frequently expressed their uneasiness when caring for BH patients, and voiced concern over the number of resources being allocated to BH patients. The average number of BH visits in the ED at that time was 528 per month.

Purpose

To address staff concerns, a survey was sent to 182 ED staff members in 2015 to discover how prepared staff felt providing care for aggressive BH patients. Survey included questions to determine staff's fears and barriers when providing care to BH patients and solicited suggestions to improve current practice and care for BH patients.

Findings from 2015 survey (n=45) supported need for additional resources for BH patients. As a result, several interventions and resources were implemented to support staff.

- Primary purpose of project was to determine if a shift in staff comfort level and satisfaction had occurred in the care of BH patients as a result of additional resources.
- Secondary purpose of project was to discover which interventions and resources were perceived by staff to be most beneficial to increase their safety, comfort level and job satisfaction when caring for BH patients.

Methods

In 2015 the ED formed a BH task force. Through collaboration with experts from residential BH, resources were discovered that had potential to be adapted to the ED setting. Only limited literature was available at the time to suggest these initiatives could work in an ED setting to increase staff support in the care of pediatric BH patients.

The first intervention was to create and implement education specific to caring for aggressive pediatric BH patients in the ED.

Additional interventions and resources implemented in response to the 2015 survey included:

- A crisis intervention team response
- Mental health crisis training
- Designated staff to work 1:1 with BH patients
- Dedicated ED behavioral health specialist (BHS)
- Dedicated 6 bed unit for ED BH patients

In 2019, 79 ED staff who were still working in the ED when the original 2015 survey was distributed were resurveyed.



Findings

- Staff in 2019 reported increased use of attempting verbal de-escalation for aggressive BH patients (65.8%) compared to 2015 (28.9%).
- Greatest concerns staff had when caring for aggressive BH patients continued to be injury (self or others) and medical patients not being seen.

How do you feel when caring for an aggressive BH patient?	2015		
	Uncomfortable	35.5%	
	Slightly Uncomfortable	13.3%	
	Comfortable	13.3%	
	Very Comfortable	0%	
	Unsure/Other	47.9%	
	2019		
	Uncomfortable	9.76%	
	Slightly Uncomfortable	26.83%	
	Comfortable	26.83%	
	Very Comfortable	9.76%	
	Unsure/Other	26.82%	

What is your initial reaction when a patient becomes aggressive to self or others?	2015		
	Call Security	37.8%	
	Attempt to Verbally Deescalate	28.9%	
	2019		
	Call Security	0%	
	Attempt to Verbally Deescalate	65.8%	

Rank concerns when caring for aggressive BH patient	2015		
	Injury to self or Others	66.7%	
	Medical Patients Unseen	17.7%	
	Lack of 1:1 PCA staff	2.2%	
	2019		
	Injury to self or Others	65.8%	
	Medical Patients Unseen	29.2%	
	Lack of 1:1 PCA staff	4.8%	

Implications for Practice

- Results demonstrate increased staff comfort and satisfaction when caring for BH patients after additional resources were made available.
- Staff from the 2019 survey reported utilizing verbal de-escalation as the chosen intervention for aggressive patients.

Rank resources found to be most helpful in supporting care of BH patients in ED

BHS in the ED 24/7	75.6%
ED designated 1:1 PCAs	43.9%
Crisis Intervention page	31.7%
Mental Health Crisis Training	31.7%
Opening MH overflow rooms (C2)	31.7%

Overall do you feel more prepared to care for BH patients than you did four years ago?
YES: 90.24% NO: 9.76%



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