Introduction

Despite the move to a standardized triage system, there appears to be a gap in the literature on a supported standard regarding the level of experience an emergency nurse should have before being permitted to perform patient triage.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore and better understand the relationship between the length of clinical nursing experience and the accuracy of assigning triage acuity levels.

Methods

**Design:** A retrospective, descriptive, quantitative design was used to explore the relationship between triage accuracy and nursing experience.

**Setting:** Level III urban trauma center, 65,000 EC visits a year.

Results

There was no significant difference in the triage accuracy between the inexperienced (83% correct) and experienced group (75% correct), χ² (1, N = 200) = 1.9, p = .16.

Instruments

The Emergency Severity Index (ESI) was used to measure the accuracy of triage.

**Summary of Triage Acuity Agreement with ESI Algorithm for Participant Experience Levels**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience Level</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Total Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inexperienced</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample size: The results from 200 charts were included in the study.

Implications

- Less experienced nurses can perform triage with the same accuracy as their more experienced counterparts.
- Focus can be shifted from the length of clinical experience to adequate preparation for the triage nurse role.
- Emergency leaders can feel confident when developing policies that allow newer nurses to triage.
- Policies should require nurses to hold emergency specific certifications and complete formalized triage training on hire and periodically.
- Experienced nurses should periodically be provided with the opportunity to practice triage cases that reinforce use of the algorithm into their working knowledge.