Needs Assessment of Emergency Department Social Workers in Southwestern Minnesota in Relation to Emergency Department Expansion

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Expansion of a hospital emergency department will affect the role of the emergency department social worker. This research project was conducted to assess the needs, concerns, and strengths of the social workers working in the department of a regional medical center. The study included 13 participants who completed an on-line survey. Results showed that participants were concerned with the increase in patient volume as well as the possible increase in wait time for patients. Participants also expressed how concerns could be addressed. The most common solution was to track information about the cases, including wait times for patients, in which the emergency department social workers were involved or were not able to see. The participants offered many suggestions on how to improve their role as social workers in the emergency department in relation to the expansion of the emergency department.

What needs or concerns do you foresee as a social worker in the emergency department with the expansion of the emergency department? How would you recommend the above needs or concerns be addressed? What could be changed to improve your ability to perform your role as an emergency department social worker? How do you spend your time as a social worker in the emergency department? Describe the strengths of your work environment that allow your role to be done well. How satisfied are you with your role? How are your needs met? How can your work environment be improved?

The data gathered in order to extract the appropriate themes.

Implications and Recommendations

Research should be continued to reveal if ED social workers are still providing the best care possible and are able to see every patient the emergency department medical team recommends. Data on patient wait time should be added to the regular data collection instrument. It is suggested that such information should be continually tracked and appropriate staffing changes be based on this data. The emergency department social service department should look into training opportunities for the social workers in relation to mental illness, personality disorders, and the commitment and revocation process. Social workers should be constantly looking for and sharing resources in the community that could benefit the patients seen. The emergency department should sustain their support work environment and keep the lines of communication open between all staff members. The support of fellow coworkers was listed by the majority of the participants as a strength of the organization that allows the social workers to perform their role well.

Summary and References available upon request.