

The Pattern of Unplanned Returns to Emergency Department

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Background: Unplanned returns are considered as one of the quality indicators of Emergency Department services. Studying characteristics of these unplanned returns may help to improve the services delivered by Emergency Department.

Objective: To determine the rate of unplanned returns to Emergency Department, the most common complaint, the diagnosis and the consistency of diagnosis on the second visit compared to the initial visit.

Setting: Emergency Department, BDF hospital, Bahrain.

Design: Descriptive cross-sectional study.

Method: One hundred and fifty-five participants were chosen at random from patients visiting the Emergency Department within 72 hours of their initial visit over 3 months period. Personal characteristics of the participants, the triage details of the first and second visits, most common complaints and diagnoses were reviewed.

Result: Six hundred ninety-one (4.6%) patients had unplanned returns within 72 hours of total visits to the Emergency Department. Three (1.9%) patients were admitted on the first visit and 40 (25.8%) upon the second visit. The most common complaints to revisit the Emergency Department were abdominal pain, 46 (29.7%) and chest pain and shortness of breath (SOB), 30 (19.4%). The most common diagnoses were gastrointestinal conditions, chest conditions and trauma 35 (22.6%), 27 (17.4%) and 19 (12.3%) respectively. The majority of complaints and diagnoses 122 (78.7%) were consistent in the two visits.

Conclusion: Unplanned returns to the Emergency Department constitute a fair proportion of total visits. Considering the characteristics of unplanned returns, it is important if specific Emergency Department populations are targeted in order to decrease unplanned returns.