Evaluation of emergency department performance: A systematic review on recommended performance and quality-in-care measures

Background
Evaluation of emergency department (ED) performance remains a difficult task due to the lack of consensus on performance measures that reflect high quality, efficiency, and sustainability.

Aim
To describe, map, and critically evaluate which performance measures that the published literature regard as being most relevant in assessing overall ED performance.

Methods
Following the PRISMA guidelines, a systematic literature review of review articles reporting accentuated ED performance measures was conducted in the databases of PubMed, Cochrane Library, and Web of Science. Study eligibility criteria includes: 1) the main purpose was to discuss, analyse, or promote performance measures best reflecting ED performance, 2) the article was a review article, and 3) the article reported macro-level performance measures, thus reflecting an overall departmental performance level.

Results
A number of articles addresses this study’s objective (n = 14 of 46 unique hits). Time intervals and patient-related measures were dominant in the identified performance measures in review articles from US, UK, Sweden and Canada. Length of stay (LOS), time between patient arrival to initial clinical assessment, and time between patient arrivals to admission were highlighted by the majority of articles. Concurrently, “patients left without being seen” (LWBS), unplanned re-attendance within a maximum of 72 hours, mortality/morbidity, and number of unintended incidents were the most highlighted performance measures that related directly to the patient. Performance measures related to employees were only stated in two of the 14 included articles.

Conclusions
A total of 55 ED performance measures were identified. ED time intervals were the most recommended performance measures followed by patient centeredness and safety performance measures. ED employee related performance measures were rarely mentioned in the investigated literature. The study’s results allow for advancement towards improved performance measurement and standardised assessment across EDs.

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