Clinical handover within the emergency care pathway and the potential risks of clinical handover failure (ECHO): primary research

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Citation

Authors' objectives
Handover and communication failures are a recognised threat to patient safety. Handover in emergency care is a particularly vulnerable activity owing to the high-risk context and overcrowded conditions. In addition, handover frequently takes place across the boundaries of organisations that have different goals and motivations, and that exhibit different local cultures and behaviours. This study aimed to explore the risks associated with handover failure in the emergency care pathway, and to identify organisational factors that impact on the quality of handover.

Authors' conclusions
The research findings suggest that handover should be understood as a sociotechnical activity embedded in clinical and organisational practice. Capacity, patient flow and national targets, and the quality of handover are intricately related, and should be addressed together. Improvement efforts should focus on providing practitioners with flexibility to make trade-offs in order to resolve tensions inherent in handover. Collaborative holistic system analysis and greater cultural awareness and collaboration across organisations should be pursued.

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