

Exploring reasons for inappropriate accident and emergency department visits in the government healthcare facility in Malaysia: A single centre qualitative study

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The inappropriate utilization of Accident and Emergency (A&E) departments for non-emergency cases poses challenges to healthcare systems worldwide. Understanding the reasons behind these inappropriate visits is crucial for improving healthcare services and resource allocation. This study aims to explore the reasons for inappropriate visits to A&E departments. **Methods:** Qualitative interviews were conducted with 20 patients who sought treatment at A&E departments for non-emergency cases. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, audio-recorded, and transcribed for analysis. **Results:** Thematic analysis revealed several reasons for inappropriate visits to A&E departments. Lack of awareness or understanding about alternative healthcare options was a prominent factor. Many patients were unaware of primary care clinics and believed A&E departments were the only option. Convenience and accessibility were also key factors, with A&E departments perceived as open 24/7 and offering immediate care without appointments. Limited access to primary care and perceived inadequacy, led patients to choose A&E departments. Fear and anxiety played a role, as patients sought reassurance and a higher level of medical attention in A&E. **Conclusion:** Addressing factors of inappropriate visits to A&E departments is crucial for optimizing healthcare resources. Strategies should focus on improving public education about appropriate healthcare options, emphasizing the role of primary care. Patient education and communication campaigns can alleviate fear and anxiety by providing clear information about when A&E care is necessary. By implementing these strategies, healthcare systems can promote appropriate healthcare utilization, enhance patient satisfaction, and alleviate the strain on A&E departments, allowing them to focus on true emergencies.