

SOUTH AFRICAN PREHOSPITAL EMERGENCY CARE PROVIDERS' UNDERSTANDING OF RESPONSIBILITIES DURING A BEHAVIOURAL EMERGENCY

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INTRODUCTION

Prehospital emergency care providers are regularly called upon to assist in the management of a mental healthcare user.(1),(2) The Mental Healthcare Act no 17 no 2002, regulates mental healthcare in South Africa and focuses on deinstitutionalisation.(3) The Act however makes no reference to the role and responsibilities prehospital emergency care providers have in the provision of mental healthcare.(3),(4)

Without any guidelines what roles and responsibilities do prehospital emergency care providers have during the management of a mental healthcare user?

METHODS

A grounded theory qualitative study design was chosen using semi-structured focus groups for each level of prehospital emergency care. Data were analysed using framework analysis

Convince mental healthcare user to receive appropriate mental care
"Try to speak to them, convince them it is best to go to hospital."(B08)

Not part of their responsibilities

Act as enforcers
"...I don't want to force anyone into my ambulance unless...risk to themselves or someone else."(Ib03)

Responsibilities towards mental healthcare user

Provide appropriate medical treatment
"If it's a treatment plan that fall under my scope, the person has injuries or some form of self-harm involvement, that is my job to sort that out."(Ib04)

Ensure scene safety
"Always make sure you and your crew are safe."(A02)

Determine the need of emergency medical services
"...give medical treatment...appropriately if the patient is injured."(I02)

General Responsibilities

Acquire additional resources
"... Police can't always gain access to properties like you want to, so you would also need to get the fire department out as well, if there's cutting being needed ..."(Bb01)

Act in the best interests of the MHCU
"... You're still in the best interest of the patient."(Bb02)

Prevent further harm and promote health
"... to prevent any further harm to them or the people around them..."(Bb01)

Report scene findings to receiving facility
"... when you arrive at hospital say that 'This is what we've found.' 'This is what the family told us.' 'Yes, we transported the patient to hospital because the blood pressure is high.' He is a known hypertension patient on medication, but this is also the reason why we did it." (Ib02)

Treatment of mental illness
"... the moment it get to the mental illness... I don't feel that it is our responsibility... try and manage the mental illness."(Ib04)

CONCLUSION

Participants placed high value on their moral and medical responsibilities towards a mental healthcare user and would like to have legislative support, better education and skills development to fulfil their responsibilities. SA legislation, prehospital clinical guidelines and training programs need revision to clarify the responsibilities prehospital emergency care providers have during the management of a mental healthcare user in the prehospital setting.

References

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