

Evaluation of a triage intervention for Ambulance Service patients with mental health problems

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BACKGROUND

- The urgent and emergency care review advocates new models of care to provide safer, faster and better care.
- Available evidence highlights scope for improving the delivery of care for patients calling 999 with mental health problems.
- Yorkshire Ambulance Service piloted specialist triage by mental health nurses in the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) during December 2014. This ongoing approach was subsequently implemented in April 2015.

EOC MENTAL HEALTH NURSE



STUDY AIM AND DESIGN

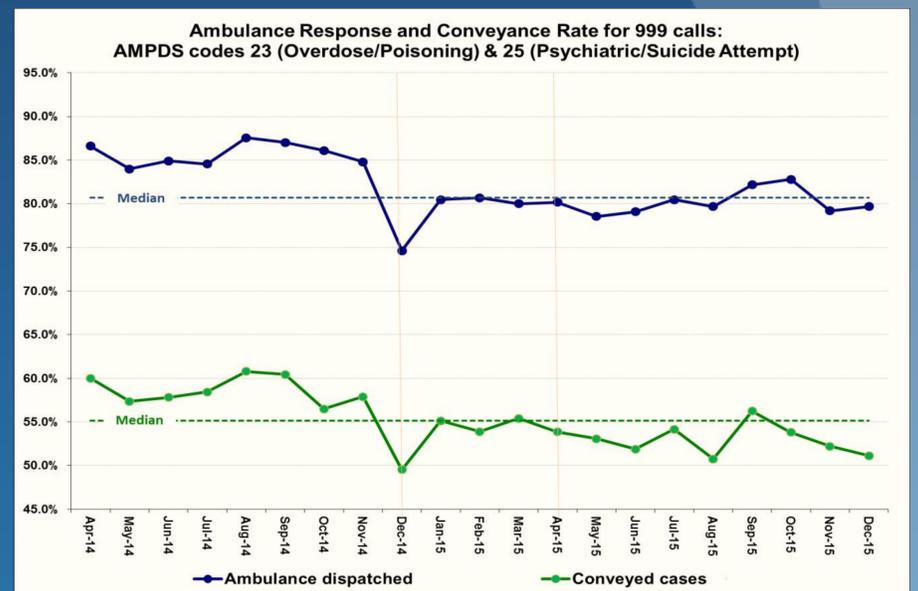
- To explore the impact, views and experiences of implementing a mental health nurse triage initiative in one EOC.
- An exploratory mixed methods evaluation.
- Interviews (n=12): Paramedics, Emergency Medical Dispatchers (EMDs) Clinical Advisors, Managers, Mental Health Nurses
- Thematic analysis
- Analysis of computer aided dispatch (CAD) data from before and after intervention

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

- **Problem identified:** In December 2014 YAS identified significant demand from calls relating to mental health problems, which jeopardised performance on responses for other life threatening emergencies.

YAS staff also raised concerns over insufficient availability and access to alternative care pathways for patients with mental health problems, reporting frustration in having little option other than to send ambulances.
- **Implementation:** Having secured CCG funding, set-up involved the rapid recruitment of agency mental health nurses and development of key safety, governance, assessment and audit documents.
- **Positive experiences:** Staff identified several key benefits including: improved patient assessment and support, improved access and communication with external agencies, as well as improvements in EOC workforce communication and morale.
- **Negative experiences:** In the context of a typically fast paced and intense working environment, staff expressed both enthusiasm and concern as they were learning and developing the intervention on a daily basis.
- **Interface with other initiatives:** The MH triage nurse initiative is one of several ways the ambulance service is working to improve care for patients with mental health problems.
- **Future developments:** Staff suggested MH nurses should be available 24/7. Scope for wider integration of the role includes training and support for YAS staff around mental health issues and joint working with the 'Frequent Caller' team.

IMPACT ON CALL RESPONSES AND CONVEYANCE



Mean response and conveyance rates before and after intervention

Intervention (months)	Ambulance Response Mean (95% CI)	Conveyance Mean (95% CI)
No MH triage (N = 11)	84.2% (82.4% - 86.1%)	57.6% (56.1% - 59.1%)
MH triage (N = 10)	79.6% (78.1% - 81.2%)	52.7% (51.3% - 54.1%)

Independent T-Test shows mean difference to be statistically significant (p=.00).

"if you don't take them to the right place the first time they will ring back and ring back, so there's a knock on effect with the call takers quadrupling the workload for not doing the right triage at the beginning"

"the mental health nurses would do a lot of self-care, whereas before we wouldn't dare do it, talking the patients down where we weren't trained to do that"

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CONCLUSIONS

Specialist mental health triage appears to deliver benefits from a patient and organisational perspective. These include, improved responses that meet the needs of 999 callers with a mental health problems, increased availability of ambulance resources and reduced conveyance to ED where not wholly appropriate.

Lessons from the qualitative findings highlight the time and effort needed to fully implement this approach, which is still evolving. More research is needed, including examination of cost-benefits.