

Occupational therapy Emergency Department assessment of culturally and linguistically diverse elderly patients

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Introduction: Occupational therapy in Emergency Departments (EDs) is an emerging area of clinical practice. Occupational therapists working in EDs need to rapidly assess the functional status of patients with a range of diagnoses. Older people with complex and chronic conditions are high users of Emergency Department (ED) services. These patients come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and may also come from low socioeconomic areas. Currently there are no clinical guidelines for occupational therapy assessment in EDs. Internationally, assessment of older people presenting to EDs is a new topic of investigation. There is need for a standardised ED occupational therapy assessment which is appropriate for patients from varying cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds and with varying medical diagnoses.

Objectives: This study aimed to develop and implement a suite of existing standardised instruments to provide a consistent approach to occupational therapy ED assessment for older people.

Methods: A literature review was conducted to identify appropriate standardised instruments with acceptable psychometric properties. A newly developed assessment package was implemented with 80 older patients from lower socio-economic, linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds presenting to the ED of a metropolitan Australian hospital. The package included: demographic data, an abbreviated format of the "OARS" Multidimensional Functional Assessment Questionnaire, cognitive assessment and a short form Geriatric Depression Scale. The clinical utility of the assessment package was evaluated using the Outcome Measures Rating Form.

Results: The demographic and clinical profile as well as the functional characteristics of older people referred to occupational therapy in EDs will be presented. The clinical utility of the assessment package with the target population will be described.

Conclusion: Standardised assessments need to be suitable for a range of people from diverse backgrounds to ensure culturally appropriate practice. This study provides unique information about the demographic, clinical and functional profile of older people who are referred to occupational therapy services in an ED. The clinical utility of a standardised assessment package for this population is also described.

Contribution to occupational therapy: Study findings provide clinicians with an insight into culturally appropriate assessment of older people in the ED.