



Is Anyone Listening?

Factors affecting time to resolution of healthcare complaints received in a diverse NSW rural public healthcare service.



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Aim

The study aimed to examine the factors impacting complaint resolution in a rural health service.

Methods

A total of 1266 complaints registered on the Incident Information Management System (IIMS) within Murrumbidgee Local Health District (MLHD) between January 2008 and December 2013 were reviewed. A cox proportional hazard regression model was used with time to complaint resolution as the outcome variable. Potential predictor variables were: time to acknowledgment, severity, age and sex of subject, relationship of complainant to subject and service type.

Results

Resolution was achieved in 82.6% (95%CI 80.4% to 84.7%) of complaints, with a mean time to resolution of 28.8 days. The majority of complainants were female (74.4%, 95%CI 71.9% to 76.8%). Most complaints were received from the patient (40.3%), a relative (22.1%), or parent (17.7%). The emergency departments (22.8%), medical services (12.3%) and surgical services (8.1%) received the majority of complaints. On average, each additional day's delay in acknowledgment reduced the probability of resolution by a factor of 2.8% per day (95%CI 1.2% to 4.3%). Odds of resolution where no harm occurred were 38% higher than for a severe incident. Complaints regarding surgical services were 75% less likely to resolve.

Discussion

This study has quantified the relationship between the time to complaints acknowledgement and time to resolution. These findings reinforce the ethical imperative for prompt acknowledgement of complaints. Further research is warranted to examine factors impacting resolution of complaints regarding severe events or surgical services and those which may prevent under-represented groups such as carers or other advocates from raising concerns.

Keywords: Consumer complaint, resolution, escalation, acknowledgement, data mining, open disclosure

For the full report on this project visit our website, follow the link to the Rural Research Capacity Building Program and click on 'view completed projects'

Nicole Smith has worked in NSW health for 18 years and is currently the Quality Systems & Complaints Manager for the Murrumbidgee Local Health District. Nicole's role sits within the Clinical Governance Unit and primarily covers the oversight of consumer complaint management and administration of the Incident Information Management System in the district, also providing training and support for LHD staff in incident and complaint management. Nicole has previously worked in consumer relations, public affairs and clinical operations and has a strong interest in strengthening the relationship between health services and the people they service.



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