

Patient and carer perspectives of transitions across acute, sub-acute and primary care

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Background

Patient and carer perspectives of care are necessary to ensure that services are not only evidence-based and clinically effective, but also acceptable to patients. This qualitative study examined care transition experiences of community-dwelling older people who present to the emergency department. The research question was “What personal, systemic and local community factors influence older peoples’ transitions across acute, sub-acute and primary care settings from the perspective of patients and their carers?”

Methods

This was an exploratory, longitudinal case study design involving a purposive sample of 19 patients and their carers. Data for each “case” included three patient and two carer interviews and a medical chart review. A total of 93 semi-structured interviews, 56 with patients and 37 with carers were conducted. A within case analysis derived a descriptive account of each case study and a thematic storyline capturing experiences, influences and determining events of the patients’ care transitions.

Results

Highly personal help seeking behaviours and rationales, personal agency in relation to health and trust in professional expertise were individual factors which influenced patient experience. Appraisal of processes of care – specifically inclusiveness; empathy; availability, timeliness and relevance of information and being treated with respect were related to both patient and carer experiences of care. Older people experienced the service landscape as complex, bewildering and difficult to navigate. Services were perceived to be operating in discrete silos with no central reference point for coordination which could leave them uncertain how to access services and with unmet needs.

Discussion

Genuine and transparent involvement of patients and carers in care planning process is required to optimise patient experience. Care transition coaching to promote self-advocacy and system navigator roles that assist patients, carers and service-providers to identify appropriate referral and access options can assist older people and their carers to proactively manage care transitions.