

# **Hospital presentations of the homeless: social work initiatives in quality improvement.**

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## **Background**

Allied Health has the ability to play a significant role in the leadership of organisational quality improvement. At Sydney Hospital and Sydney Eye Hospital this can be seen through research by Social Work undertaken into homeless presentations to the hospital. Conducted to compile baseline data on the homeless population accessing the service, it reviewed services/disciplines involved with people prior to admission, during their stay and referrals made on discharge; with the plan to refine and enhance the service being provided.

## **Methods**

In 2013 the South East Sydney Local Health District conducted a homelessness data project that recorded all homeless presentations across the hospitals in the district in a one week census. Data was extrapolated from this project and then data-mined through medical records to yield specific and relevant information relating to the population presenting directly to Sydney Hospital and Sydney Eye Hospital.

## **Results**

21% of presentations resulted in hospital admission and of those not admitted the average length of stay was 3 hours. The mean age was 35.7 years with males making up 89% of the clients reviewed. There were a variety of reasons for presentation and over 20% of clients were known to have used drugs or alcohol or had a mental health diagnosis. Only 10% had documented informal social supports and 42% had accessed some form of services prior to presentation.

## **Discussion**

The evidence demonstrates that the main area for response is within the emergency department but also confirms that there is a small timeframe in which this can occur. Due to this it would appear that multi-service collaboration, increasing integrated care could enhance outcomes for clients. The wealth of information that this research has provided also shows that this method of research could be useful and transferable to other at-risk populations in health-care facilities.