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Frank Archer

Malcolm Woollard

Helen Snooks

h.a.snooks@swan.ac.uk

Angela Evans

Bridget Wells

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Frank Archer, Malcolm Woollard, Helen Snooks, Angela Evans, Bridget Wells, Julie Peconi, and Marie Thomas



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SPECIAL REPORT

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What are the highest priorities for research in pre-hospital care? Results of a review and Delphi consultation exercise

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Helen Snooks, Professor in Health Services Research and Chair, 999 EMS Research Forum¹, **Angela Evans**, Researcher¹, **Bridget Wells**, Researcher¹, **Julie Peconi**, Researcher¹, **Marie Thomas**, Researcher¹

In conjunction with 999 EMS Research Forum Board members: **Frank Archer**, Professor², **Tom Clarke**, Consultant Anaesthetist³, **Jeremy Dale**, Professor of Primary Care⁴, **Rachel Donohoe**, Head of Clinical Audit and Research⁵, **Henry Guly**, Consultant in A & E Medicine⁶, **Chris Hartley-Sharpe**, Ambulance Operations Manager⁵, **David Janes**, Lecturer in Emergency Pre-hospital Care⁷, **Fionna Moore**, Medical Director⁵, **Jon Nicholl**, Professor in Health Services Research⁸, **Janette Turner**, Research Fellow⁸, **Julia Williams**, Principal Lecturer¹⁰, **Malcolm Woollard**, Professor in Pre-hospital & Emergency Care⁹,

¹Swansea University, ²Monash University, Australia, ³Newcastle City Hospital, ⁴University of Warwick, UK, ⁵London Ambulance Service, ⁶Derriford Hospital, Plymouth, ⁷University College Dublin, ⁸University of Sheffield, ⁹University of Hertfordshire, UK, ¹⁰Coventry University, UK.

Background

A recent national review of English ambulance services, *Taking Healthcare to the Patient: Transforming NHS Ambulance Services*¹ published by the Department of Health, recommended that pre-hospital care research topics should be prioritised to ensure that service provision and development are evidence based wherever possible and that limited available funds are targeted to the most pressing needs.

Study objectives

To identify gaps in research evidence related to delivery of pre-hospital care; and to rank topics in order of priority for research.

Methods

Research priorities were initially identified by delegates at the UK Ambulance Service Association's annual conference, AMBEX 2006. An examination of research reviews in pre-hospital care identified other research evidence gaps. Relevant websites, databases and review bibliographies were also searched. Management, service delivery and treatment recommendations in UK policy/guidance documents published since 2000 were matched to research evidence. A list of evidence gaps was circulated in a Delphi-style three-round consultation to experts in pre-hospital care, including clinicians, managers and researchers. Round 1 confirmed/identified

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research gaps; Round 2 focussed on ranking topics; and Round 3 reviewed the scores and provided an option to rescore. Scores were analysed using SPSS.

Results

Ninety-six research issues were identified for circulation and prioritisation from 52 reviews and expert consultation and these were matched against 30 policy and guidance documents. Forty people participated in the Delphi exercise. The subject receiving highest priority for research was the development of new performance measures other than emergency ambulance response times. Other highly ranked priorities included treatment of stroke, cardiac conditions, children and people who self-harm; alternatives to Accident and Emergency (A&E) treatment; patient information sharing across care providers; access issues; decision support systems; and demand management systems for pre-hospital care. These priorities reflect three key issues: measuring activity to benefit patients; development of safe non-A&E care; and providing appropriate evidence-based clinical care in the pre-hospital environment.

Implications

There are many evidence gaps related to current pre-hospital policy and practice including management, clinical and service delivery issues. This Delphi consultation combines expertise of clinicians, managers and researchers to generate consensus on future research priorities in pre-hospital care. The need to develop meaningful performance measures plus alternative methods of patient management illustrates the synergistic relationship between service delivery and performance measurement. It suggests an opportunity to identify alternatives to response times as indicators of quality of pre-hospital care. The final results from this study will be useful to commissioners when developing their strategic approach to decision making about which research should be funded to facilitate continued development of quality patient care in the pre-hospital setting.

Full report available at: http://www.jephc.com/full_article.cfm?content_id=506

For further information about this publication or any other activity by the 999 EMS Research Forum, please contact:

Helen Snooks
Professor of Health Services Research
Centre for Health Information, Research and Evaluation (CHIRAL)
School of Medicine
Swansea University
Swansea, Wales
UK
SA2 8PP

Telephone: +44 01792 513418

Fax: +44 01792 513423

Email: h.a.snooks@swan.ac.uk

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Note

The 999 EMS Research Forum is a partnership of international academics, clinicians and pre-hospital care practitioners and managers, formed in 1999, whose aim is to encourage, promote and disseminate research and evidence based policy and practice in 999 emergency healthcare. Since its inception, the Forum has been sponsored by the UK Department of Health and other funders to undertake training, to hold an annual conference, and to undertake other activities to promote and develop capacity in pre-hospital care research.

