

Project title:

Identifying service improvements for primary care provision: evaluating patient and carer experiences of using 'out-of-hours' services.

The Unscheduled & Emergency care system includes GP out-of-hours, A&E, ambulance and NHS Direct services. Most of the current GP out-of-hours services began in late 2004 following the implementation of the 2003 GP Contract. However the design of these services was not strongly evidence-based - there is a dearth of evidence from within Wales or internationally with which to design and implement a patient-centred, effective, safe and efficient service. Furthermore, little is known about why users choose different components of the unscheduled care services, whether this is appropriate, and how the services perform on effectiveness and safety measures. However these services are clearly under great strain, with massive impact on NHS Trust and in-patient services.

Several types of GP out-of-hours providers have operated across Wales since October 2004. This is an all-Wales study, seeking evidence about users' experiences of Unscheduled care as to whether the services are meeting needs, achieving successful outcomes for users, and to identify how users can be enabled to use services most effectively. It aims to deepen understanding about the 'special cause variation' that places the service under great strain, affecting the acute sector generally (e.g. medical admission units) and wider (e.g. social care). From this we will devise interventions to enhance effective provision and efficient service delivery from both users' and providers' perspectives.

Aims:

The study aims to examine users' experiences of Unscheduled care, particularly GP out-of-hours services, through both quantitative and qualitative methods, including whether the services are meeting needs, achieving successful outcomes, and how users could use services most effectively. From this we will identify how services can develop to meet strategic goals, and consult with stakeholders on how to implement these developments.

The objectives are:

- to identify representative samples of 250 users from each of the 10 GP out-of-hours providers; & A&E departments, non-admitted 999 users, and NHS Direct in the case-study areas;
- to use the validated OPQ instrument to assess users' experiences with these Unscheduled care services regarding process of care (satisfaction) and outcome ('patient enablement');
- to collate 'routinely-collected' service activity data via HIRU research network, focusing on the case-study areas;
- also in these areas, to conduct telephone interviews to explore needs, reasons for choosing the service(s), experiences, effectiveness, and areas for improvement that could meet user and provider goals;
- to interpret these data in the context of their geographical and social variations, and provider types, and identify feasible initiatives for implementation in the next phases of service commissioning;
- to consult with key stakeholders (users, providers, policy-makers and purchasers) about implementation, report to individual services/regions and identify suitable Health Services Research methods to evaluate interventions in piloting and formal externally-funded evaluation.

This study is funded by the **Wales Office of Research & Development for Health and Social Care**. It involves a multidisciplinary collaboration of Researchers from Cardiff and Swansea Universities.

For more information, please see contact details below.

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