

Why Do Patients with Minor Medical Problems Seek Medical Care from the Emergency Department?

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Background: Patients with minor medical problems sometimes go to the emergency department seeking care. This could overload the emergency department (ED) and lengthen patient's waiting time.

Objective: The aim of the study is to identify the reasons that make patients with minor complaints seek medical care from the ED.

Design: Cross-sectional study.

Setting: Accident and Emergency department, Salmaniya Medical Complex.

Method: Four hundred eighty-five patients with minor ailments were interviewed and questionnaires were filled in February 2012. The questionnaire identified mainly the medical problem for which the patient sought advice from the emergency department (ED) and the source of referral. Patients were divided into two main categories; patients who attended ED but who would have gone to their family physicians and those who attended ED but who would have not gone to their family physicians. The cause for attending the ED and not the primary health centers was also identified.

Result: Four hundred eighty-five patients were interviewed. Three hundred twenty-nine (67.3%) were males. The majority of the patients were adults. Three hundred twenty-five (67%) patients were self-referred while one hundred and forty-four (29.7%) were referred from the health center.

Conclusion: This study revealed that the majority of patients were self-referred. The most common minor medical problems encountered in the emergency department were musculoskeletal and ENT complaints. There was a significant difference in the expected reasonable time to wait between those not willing to go to their health centers and those willing to go.