

How do doctors, nurses and healthcare assistants in the Acute Medical Unit (AMU) manage patients who have diarrhoea and vomiting?

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Background



Globally, it is known that outbreaks of infectious diarrhoea and vomiting cause considerable disruption to hospital services. Nonetheless, despite numerous published outbreak reports and intervention studies, little is known about the day-to-day assessment and decision-making processes of hospital-based clinicians and whether there is any potential to improve practice and reduce the transmission of infection.

A literature review undertaken as part of this research project identified only one observational study designed to investigate the procedures that hospital staff follow in order to determine the causes of adult patients symptoms of diarrhoea and vomiting¹. As a matter of concern, despite the study having identified shortcomings in the assessment practices of observed clinicians, no follow up studies appear to have been conducted in order to ascertain whether the identified shortcomings had been addressed or are still prevalent in contemporary practice.

This study will therefore investigate how hospital-based clinicians currently assess and manage patients with symptoms of diarrhoea and vomiting and the factors that influence their decisions.

Methodology

An ethnographic observational study will be conducted in one medical admissions unit of a large university teaching hospital. Data will be collected during four time periods to coincide with the four seasons of the meteorological calendar in order to observe whether there are any differences in clinical practice due to the seasonality of diarrhoeal illnesses caused by Norovirus and *Clostridium difficile*. Data collection will comprise of observations of clinical practice, think-aloud and semi-structured interviews with doctors, nurses and healthcare assistants, clinician-led photo walkabouts, interviews with patients, and reviews of written assessments documented in the medical notes of eligible patients.



Discussion

In the current economic climate where it is estimated that hospital outbreaks of infectious diarrhoea and vomiting are costing the NHS approximately £115 million each year², it is important to ascertain how current guidance is being implemented in clinical practice. Furthermore, in a culture where patient-centred care is highly advocated, it is vital to understand the care experiences of patients with symptoms of diarrhoea and vomiting so as to optimise care for this patient group³.

Results

It is anticipated that this study will provide insight into the factors that influence the implementation of local guidance on the management of patients who present with symptoms of potentially infectious diarrhoea and vomiting. It will also elucidate the patients' experiences of care.



Implications for clinical practice

It is anticipated that this study will help hospital leaders identify ways to support clinicians implement evidence-based practice guidelines relating to the care and management of patients with potentially infectious diarrhoea and vomiting. It is also anticipated that this study will help clinicians identify ways to optimise the care of patients with symptoms of diarrhoea and vomiting.

References:

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