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THE CASUALTY WATCH PROJECT

BRIEFING NOTES

Comment

Systematic, co-ordinated inspection of health service facilities has not materialised as a feature of CHC (Community Health Council) organisation in the twenty years they have served their communities. Their monitoring and advisory role has been dominated by a concentration on local interests, and an emphasis on responding to local demands following complaints, and visits. Casualty Watch is the first example of co-ordinated, data-collection and analysis to assess service quality in the history of CHC's.

Background

Casualty Watch began in King's College Hospital in 1990 and was initiated by Southwark CHC's Acute Group, following a decision by King's College Hospital to close hundreds of beds in August 1989. A decision which immediately led to the widely publicised "ware housing" of seriously ill people on trolleys - a practice that has since spread widely to other hospitals. The CHC became increasingly concerned, because patients were waiting for up to 20 hours on trolleys in the A & E Department at King's and fears mounted when two people died in such circumstances.

Method

Casualty Watch is a unique and highly effective means of monitoring emergency services provided by acute hospital. The project collects information by fax from 30 to 40 CHCs on the last Monday of every month at 4.30 pm and rapidly processes this information. Details of the worst trolley waits are issued by 11.00 am the following morning and full reports within one week. The Casualty Watch visitor spends about ½ an hour or more depending on the circumstance in the casualty department and collects information about waits, diagnosis, plans for patients, age and gender.