Plain English summary

In this study we aimed to look at influences on decisions made about patients by front-line ambulance service staff (paramedics). We were particularly interested in whether and where patients were transported and the impact of decisions on patient safety. We were also interested in safety culture within the organisation and how this might influence staff.

We used a number of research methods including interviews, observations, digital diaries and focus groups with staff and service users to collect data at three ambulance service trust sites. This allowed us to gather information that represented a wide range of views and experiences. We fed back the study findings to ambulance service staff and service user participants at three workshops.

Data were analysed to identify the main issues of importance in relation to influences on staff decision-making. A number of different types of decisions that paramedics make on scene were identified along with a number of influences on decision-making. The main influences were demand, access to care services, performance targets, fear of risk, training and education, communication and resources (staff and equipment). The workshop attendees felt that these findings reflected their experiences and concerns.

Recommendations for future research include exploring effective ways of providing access to care for people who do not need to attend the accident and emergency department, assessing the effects of different staff skill levels on patient safety, exploring safe ways of improving initial telephone assessments and exploring public awareness and expectations of the ambulance service.
Health Services and Delivery Research

ISSN 2050-4349 (Print)
ISSN 2050-4357 (Online)

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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HS&DR programme or one of its proceeding programmes as project number 10/1007/53. The contractual start date was in May 2012. The final report began editorial review in November 2013 and was accepted for publication in May 2014. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HS&DR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HS&DR programme or the Department of Health. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HS&DR programme or the Department of Health.

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