

ABSTRACT

Inequalities in the distribution of health services will forever dictate that patients are transferred from one hospital to another in search of better services. Centralization of services, recruitment issues, high patient expectations and inadequate funding of the health sector are major constraint in the application of principles of patient transfer by Divisional Hospitals in Nuwaraeliya District.

However, sufficient attempts have not been made to bring our ambulance service to be in par with those of developed countries. Increasing the “number of ambulance” has been the only step taken so far to improve this very important service. Therefore, studying the factors affecting the patient transferring is useful to improve the quality of health care in the Nuwaraeliya District in the Central Province.

This study was carried out to evaluate the factors affecting patient transfer from Primary Health Care Institutions in Nuwaraeliya District. This study was a descriptive cross sectional study with prospective and retrospective components. The study was composed of two components, a facility survey and a descriptive study on factors affecting patient transfer from Primary Health Care Institutions (PHCI) in Nuwaraeliya District. The PHCI and the patients transferred from PHCI to other hospital formed the study populations in this research.

All the PHCI in the district were selected for the facility survey. For the 2nd component, sample size was calculated assuming 50% of the transfers will be delayed. Accordingly 430 transfers were included in the second component of the

study. Two study instruments were used in the study, a check list and an interviewer administered questionnaire.

The study has shown some important findings. In the Nuwaraeliya District a fair percentage of ambulances are past their useful age. Only basic facilities were available in the ambulance for monitoring and resuscitation of transferred patients. There are no additional drivers in the Nuwaraeliya District for ambulances. Transfer arranging time and patient handing over time were considerably high due to unavailability of proper communication facilities. Average time for a transfer was 403.41 minutes. Out of this most of time goes for handing over the patient at receiving hospital. Average speed of transfer out was 32.4Km/h and average speed of return back was 28.15Km/h.

The study makes following recommendations to improve quality of this important services. The technological supports for communication should be used to align and adjust the timing of communication, such as information technology, email, mobile phones. Old ambulances should be replaced with new ambulances and improvement of the basic facilities in the ambulances at least to cover requirements of basic life support will improve outcome of the transfers.

Staff cadre should be revised to improve quality of the services. Periodic medical checkup must be done for drivers to assess their health status.

Guidelines must be developed regarding patient transfer and to reduce handing over time by giving priority to transferred patients.

Key words: Ambulance, Patient Transfer