A survey of medical social services in local Accident and Emergency departments

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This study is a structured questionnaire survey on all doctors and nurses working in 14 local Accident & Emergency Departments (EDs) on medical social services. The objectives of this study are to find out: (1) service provision and referral patterns in local EDs; (2) perceptions of doctors and nurses on the present service. In addition to routine referrals during office hours, nearly half of the respondents reported availability of on-site services per request, phone consults during office hours, and support during disaster activation. The most common social problems that doctors would refer to medical social service included child abuse, battered spouse, rape/sexual assault, deliberate self-harm and elderly patients with discharge problem. Over half of the doctors and nurses said the existing services were inadequate and the main shortcoming was no after office hours coverage. In cases of crisis intervention, 56% of doctors and 36% of nurses felt that medical social workers would only be helpful if they were available at short notice most time of the day. To improve the existing service, 62% of doctors and 43% of nurses thought that medical social workers should provide adequate feedback. Other areas for improvement included on-site service, 24-hour coverage and more experienced workers. (Hong Kong j.emerg.med. 2001;8:135-139)

Keywords: Medical social service, satisfaction, utilization