

Title: Electronic Health Record Documentation of Social Conditions among Pediatric Hospitalizations with Concern for Maltreatment

Background

Hospitalized children with concern for abuse represent a unique cohort of children with complex social situations, the need for multi-sector service coordination, the potential for discharge into foster care, and require a comprehensive assessment of social conditions and needs.

Objective

This study examined abuse type frequencies; associations with social conditions by abuse type; and patterns in electronic health record (EHR) documentation of social conditions, including note types and authors, among a sample of children aged 0-5 years old hospitalized between 2016-2020 with concern for abuse at a free-standing academic children's hospital in California.

Methods

A secondary analysis was conducted using pre-existing data extracted from the hospital EHR. Sample and EHR documentation characteristics were assessed via frequencies and percentages. Associations among abuse type, demographics, and social conditions were evaluated using the Chi-square Test for Independence.

Results

Analysis of 251 cases of pediatric hospitalizations with concern for abuse revealed neglect 94 (37.5%), physical abuse 80 (31.9%), combined 71 (28.3%), and other 6 (2.5%). Commonly documented social condition needs included CPS involvement (49%), food insecurity (37.8%), financial insecurity (35.1%), housing insecurity (31.5%), substance exposure (25%), and transportation challenges (24%). Associations varied between abuse type and social condition needs. EHR data on social conditions were documented in different locations, entered by different health care team members, and were not equally accessible to all health care team members.

Conclusion

Accurate collection during hospitalization of data regarding social conditions, such as using a standardized template with continued surveillance, may potentially prevent future child maltreatment and additionally improve hospital management, resource facilitation, and outcomes for children who are hospitalized with concern for abuse. However, further research is needed to understand the applicability of existing assessment modalities used to evaluate social conditions and needs within the context of pediatric hospitalizations with concern for child abuse.