

Total triage model in general practice: a systematic review of the opportunities and challenges

Background

Total triage (TT) has the potential to achieve more equitable access to primary care, to improve the overall quality of care, and enhance health outcomes. TT has gained increasing attention from the public, policymakers, and academics.

Aim

To examine relevant scientific literature regarding the implementation of TT, the reported opportunities and challenges for patients and staff, and implications for practice.

Method

Medline, Embase, CINAHL, and Scopus were searched for articles and grey literature between 2013 and February 2023. Included documents described the implementation of TT during in-hours general practice and provided perspectives from patients/staff. Patients and stakeholders were involved throughout each stage of the review process. Findings were synthesised using a framework approach.

Results

In total, 23 documents were included at full-text screening. Analysis highlights a range of TT approaches, sometimes conflating remote and TT systems. TT was seen to both increase and reduce workload. Consistently, patient and staff views worsened with TT use. TT can increase barriers to care access with potential to exacerbate inverse care laws across the UK. Critical knowledge gaps included patient co-production in TT systems and the role of reception teams to adapt systems to meet patients' needs.

Conclusion

TT can influence patient access, safety, and equity. The approach may also generate profoundly different working styles for general practice. This review adds to current debates surrounding patient access and TT, and consequences for staff/patients. The findings can be used to aid practices when navigating the new GP contract and the implementation of new TT approaches.

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