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Creation of an Electronic Referral Pathway for Pelvic and Acetabular Fractures in Times of Austerity

Abstract:

Sir

The Adelaide and Meath Hospital in Tallaght is the national referral centre for all pelvic and acetabular trauma in Ireland. Referrals were made by contacting the trauma registrar on call and forwarding a letter with a copy of the patient's films (routinely by taxi) for review. Once the films were reviewed, a decision was made as to whether surgical intervention was necessary and if so, the patient was accepted for transfer. This referral system had a number of failings, in that there was a time delay and no formal record of the consultation. Another issue was that x-ray films could go missing in transit. These factors contributed to delays in patient transfer and ultimately time to surgery. Therefore it was decided to create a new referral system that would address these issues.

Initially a database was established on the trauma departmental office computers. However, this was not successful as it was not universally adopted with data being entered retrospectively without capture of all the relevant information and x-rays still being sent manually with frequent delays. This then led to discussions with the IT department about a possible solution. The intention was to create a new electronic referral pathway that would address all concerns with minimal cost to the hospital. The hospital already had an internal internet and emailing system which allowed group emails to be sent to people on specified lists or within departments. It was also possible to restrict access on this system to designated people. This software formed the basis of the solution to the problem and additional software at the cost of only 400 euro was all that had to be purchased by the hospital. A web page on the internal hospital internet was created, to which all pelvic referrals would be sent and permanently recorded. All the doctors listed as members of the trauma department were allowed access to this web page. The electronic referral system is now operational for 2 years and operates as follows, to make a referral, the trauma registrar on call is contacted and informed of the case. The person making the referral then sends an email to pelvic&acetabulartrauma@amnch.ie documenting patient details with appropriate images so that a decision can be made about surgical intervention. The system then emails the hospital email account of listed doctors, informing them of a referral. The referral email is automatically permanently stored with the time and date of referral noted.

Since operational, the vast majority of the referrals are now received through this system. One of the main bonuses of this system, in conjunction with the instant access to the data, is the permanent record that it provides of all data received, which can be later used for research purposes. There are further areas of improvement for this system, however we believe we have made a good start.

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