

Risk Review Online

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Communication Breakdown among ED Providers

Communication breakdown – especially among practitioners – is one of the major contributors of claims arising in the Emergency Department (ED).

Urgent situations and critical decision-making in the often-chaotic environment of an ED bring together strangers: for the patient – clinicians and rotating staff members due to shift changes and surroundings; for the clinician – unknown patients, fragmented medical histories and unfamiliar family members.

Unlike other clinician-patient relationships, those forged in the ED are done so with the complicating challenges of time, acuity, complexity and hastily compiled medical information. In this environment, you are expected to review the information gathered, make a diagnosis and develop a treatment plan. Because of the acute nature of many of the significant health-related issues with which patients present to the ED, a patient's status can change rapidly, requiring more frequent and necessary communication between care givers.

Perhaps nowhere else in the medical community is communication more vital than for the physicians practicing medicine in this demanding and unforgiving environment.

Exploring ways to promote effective communication and the relationships forged in the ED, a comprehensive white paper entitled **Optimizing Physician-Nurse Communication in the Emergency Department: Strategies for Minimizing Diagnosis-Related Errors** has recently been released by CRICO/RMF Strategies.

Three Princeton Insurance-insured ED physicians served as members of the team who collaborated on the development of the paper, which revealed that communication problems and information gaps between physicians and nurses were a primary driver of diagnostic failure in the ED.

According to medical malpractice data from CRICO/RMF Strategies' Comparative Benchmark System (CBS) database, which includes Princeton Insurance data, emergency medicine is among the top five specialties with the highest malpractice claims, and diagnostic failure is the number one cause of medical liability in this area.

To download the full report, click [here](#).

To read a press release on the development of the report, click [here](#).

Also, be sure to read our current *From the Resource Line* article addressing bridge orders (aka transition orders) [here](#). It outlines the differences between an "order to admit," "admission order" and "bridge orders" and offers helpful guidelines for implementing a transition order policy.

An article appearing in the Health & Wellness section of the **Wall Street Journal** on May 10, 2011 also discusses the need for better communication among providers in the ED setting, while highlighting conditions, mistakenly given diagnoses and the circumstances often leading to the wrong diagnoses. View it [here](#).

Strangers in Crisis Course Available

Princeton Insurance can help you learn to avoid the most common pitfalls that lead to communication breakdown, and ultimately, claims that often arise in the ED. We offer Strangers in Crisis courses designed for this setting. Visit our CME page [here](#), call us at 1-866-Rx-4RISK or send us an [email](#) if you would like to schedule a class or learn more.