Applied Innovation

CONSUMER REPORTING OF DIAGNOSTIC ERRORS
IN EMERGENCY MEDICINE

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**Statement of the problem**

The IOM report “Improving Diagnosis in Medicine” states that all of us will experience at least one diagnostic error in our lifetime, sometimes with devastating consequences. Since the inception of modern patient safety movements in the late 1990s, little attention has been paid to the knowledge and experience of patients and their families on patient safety, and the role they could play in helping to reduce the incidence and impact of preventable adverse events in health care.

For clinicians to calibrate their diagnostic reasoning, feedback on their diagnoses is crucial. Encouraging consumers to report back when their diagnosis evolves or is incorrect, is essential for clinicians to improve their diagnostic accuracy.

**Description of program**

In 2012 a specialty specific, anonymous online incident reporting system was established for emergency medicine in Australasia. In mid-2016, this was extended to include a consumer (patient) portal, where patients can directly report errors
(or compliments) that occur during their care, or that of their relative, including diagnostic error. Consumers are asked 9 questions about their experience, of which 3 are mandatory. Free text answers are sought, including a description of how the incident reported could have been prevented.

**Findings to date**

Diagnostic errors are amongst the most frequently reported incidents by consumers. Consumer reports demonstrate cognitive biases in clinician thinking, including premature closure, triage cueing and fundamental attribution bias (for example, where a patient is blamed for their disease). Consumers identify poor coordination of care and problems with communication (clinical handover, disrespectful communication, and ‘not listening’). Several reports describe clinicians disregarding parent and family concerns regarding their relatives’ diagnosis.

**Lessons learned**

The patient perspective could be described as the missing piece in the puzzle that is safe healthcare. Consumer reporting can be used to help identify diagnostic errors in medicine, as well as contributing factors and preventative strategies. In the future it may also be used to help us understand why certain emergency conditions are frequently misdiagnosed.