

The Triage and Management of Pregnant Women who Present to the Emergency Department



Why do Pregnant Women Present to the Emergency Department

A number of different models of midwifery care are available to women in Queensland, including midwifery led care, shared care arrangements and care by an obstetrician. Nevertheless, pregnant women may still need to attend the Emergency Department for reasons of convenience and availability (open 24/7), finance (free), and for emergency complaints which need immediate attention.

Pregnant women who present to the Emergency Department can generally be categorised into four main groups:

- » **Emergency, pregnancy related:** Conditions such as antepartum and postpartum haemorrhage, unexpected birth and ectopic pregnancies (Cameron et al., 2004; Stepp Gilbert, 2007).
- » **Emergency, non-pregnancy related:** Trauma, such as motor vehicle accidents and domestic violence incidents as well as pre-existing medical conditions, such as asthma, cardiac or renal complaints (Cameron et al., 2004; Stepp Gilbert, 2007).
- » **Non-emergency, pregnancy related:** Minor discomforts of pregnancy, such as morning sickness, back pain and indigestion.
- » **Non-emergency, non-pregnancy related:** Minor discomforts unrelated to the woman's pregnancy, such as sporting injuries (sprained ankle or fracture), flu type symptoms and stomach 'bugs'.

Research Aim and Outcome

This study aims to assess the triaging and management of pregnant women in the Emergency Department. Anecdotal evidence from midwives and emergency nurses indicate that pregnant women are not managed in a consistent manner when treated in the department. In this study key clinical personnel will investigate if a problem does exist and, if so, determine the extent of the problem. The researcher will work collaboratively with hospital staff to improve care for pregnant women who present to the department, and evaluate the effectiveness of any strategies that are implemented. The research will produce a better understanding of how pregnant women are assessed and managed in the Emergency Department so that better treatment protocols can be established.



Study Design

Action research methodology underpins this study. Action research is a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by a group of people to understand and improve practices to real life problems (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Real life problems (i.e. clinical research problems) require a collaborative approach to ensure accurate and sustainable solutions are developed and implemented, which respond to real, rather than perceived needs of participants. A key purpose of action research is to produce strategies and practical knowledge which are useful to people in everyday life (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). These new strategies and knowledge will benefit the clinical situation, health professionals and pregnant women who present to the Emergency Department.

Ethical approval has been granted for this study by the Townsville Hospital Service District Ethics Committee [Approval Number 18/07] and James Cook University Ethics Committee [Approval Number H 2627].

References

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The Action Research Cycle

