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Non-urgent use of the emergency department by pediatric patients: A theory guided approach for primary and acute care pediatric nurse practitioners

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Providing quality cost-effective care to children and their families in the appropriate setting is the goal of nurse practitioners in primary and acute care. However, increased utilization of the emergency department (ED) for non-urgent care threatens cost-effective quality care, interrupts continuity of care and contributes to ED overcrowding. To date, descriptive research has identified demographics of those using the ED for non-urgent care, the chief complaints of children seeking non-urgent care, the cost to the healthcare system of pediatric non-urgent care, and characteristics of associated primary care settings. Using Donabedian's Model of Quality of Healthcare (1988) and a Theory of Dependent Care (Taylor, Renpenning, Geden, Neuman & Hart, 2001) acute and primary care Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (PNP) can incorporate interventions that will channel care to the appropriate setting and educate caregivers regarding common childhood illnesses and the value of continuity of care. By using a theoretical framework as a guide both acute and primary care PNPs may understand why parents seek non-urgent care for their children in the ED and actions they can take to assure care is provided in an optimal setting.

Biography

Mary Jean Ohns has obtained her DNP degree from Wayne State University. Her DNP project addressed non-urgent use of the emergency department by pediatric patients. She is a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner in the Pediatric Emergency Department at Toledo Children's Hospital. She is also on Faculty in the College of Nursing at the University of Toledo. An article describing the theoretical framework of her DNP project has been accepted for publication in the *Journal of Pediatric Health Care*.

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