



Psychiatric Emergency Triage in Iran; the Need for a Specific Tool

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Dear Editor,

Within the hospital emergency department (ED) the triage is a process for sorting the visitors with the aim of identifying those patients who cannot wait safely [1]. Thus accurate triage of the ED visitors has an undeniable role in patient safety [2]. Several triage systems have been developed and used in hospital EDs around the world [3]. In Iran the Emergency Severity Index- ESI triage system is recommended by the Ministry of Health to be used in hospital EDs [4]. The system is a 5-level triage scale first developed in US. Although it includes examples of mental health problems, it is originally developed for use of general hospitals. The ESI 1 category is devoted to those who need a life-saving intervention. Patients of ESI 2 category are those who had high-risk situation or their vital signs are at danger zone. Categories of 3, 4 and 5 are assigned to the patients based on predicted need for resources such as consultation, lab test and graphs [5].

Since the patients with traumatic and somatic problems usually are not referred to the single-specialty psychiatry hospitals, the ESI triage and other similar systems that are developed for general hospitals' ED are not appropriate for the single-

specialty psychiatric EDs. On the other hand, triage scales that are specific to mental health problems results in more explicit categorization of patients than triage scales designed originally for general hospitals [6]. Therefore it is better for the psychiatry hospitals to use a triage tool designed specifically for them.

There are more than 40 single-specialty psychiatry hospitals in Iran of which 12 are located in the capital city Tehran. Also a total of 30 hospital wards within general hospitals of the country are devoted to the care of the patients with mental health problems. Yet the hospitals use the ESI triage or in some cases they use triage protocols developed by their own or translated from other countries without any scientific study on validity and reliability of such protocols. With the best of our knowledge and as the search result shows, there is not any published study on the validity and/ or reliability of psychiatric triage in hospitals of Iran. Thus we propose the psychiatry and mental health EDs to use a triage system that is developed specifically for them and its validity and reliability is examined through scientific studies.

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