Health Care Provision during a Sporting Mass Gathering: A Structure and Process Description of On-Site Care Delivery

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Introduction: During mass gatherings, such as marathons, the provision of timely access to health care services is required for the mass gathering population as well as the local community. However, effective provision of health care during sporting mass gatherings is not well understood.

Aim: To describe the structures and processes developed for an emergency team to operate an in-event acute health care facility during one of the largest mass sporting participation events in the southern hemisphere, the Gold Coast marathon.

Methods: A pragmatic qualitative methodology was used to describe the structures and processes required to operate an in-event acute health care facility providing services for marathon runners and spectators. Content analysis from 12 semi-structured interviews with Emergency Department (ED) clinical staff working during the two-day event was undertaken in 2016.

Results: Structural elements that underpinned the in-event health care facility included: physical spaces such as the clinical zones in the marathon health tent, tent access, and egress points; and resources such as bilingual staff, senior medical staff, and equipment such as electrocardiograms. Critical processes included: clear communication pathways, interprofessional care coordination, and engagement involving shared knowledge of and access to resources. Distinct but overlapping clinical scope between nurses and doctors was also noted as important for timely care provision and appropriate case management. Staff outlined many perceived benefits and opportunities of in-event health care delivery including ED avoidance and disaster training.

Discussion: This in-event model of emergency care delivery enabled acute out-of-hospital health care to be delivered in a portable and transportable facility. Clinical staff reported satisfaction with their ability to provide a meaningful contribution to hospital avoidance and to the local community. With the number of sporting mass gatherings increasing, this temporary, in-event model of health care provision is one option for event and health care planners to consider.

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