

Referral Pattern of Patients Received at the National Referral Hospital: Challenges in Low Income Countries

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To examine the medical referral pattern of patients received at the Muhimbili National Hospital (MNH) in order to inform the process of strengthening the referral system.

Methods: The study design was a prospective study conducted at MNH during a 10-week study period from January to March 2004. The study sample consisted of patients referred to MNH

Results: Of the 11,412 patients seen, 72.5% were self-referrals. More than 70% of the patients seen required admission, though not necessarily at tertiary level. Only 0.8% came from outside the Dar es Salaam region. More than 70% of the patients seen required admission. Surgical services were required by 66.8% of patients, with obstetric conditions being most prominent (24.6% of all patients). For those who were formally referred from other health services, lack of expertise and equipment were the most common reasons given for referral (96.3%).

Conclusion: Efforts to improve referral systems in low-income countries require that the primary and secondary level hospitals services be strengthened and increased so as to limit inappropriate use of national referral hospitals.

KEYWORDS

Referral System, Tertiary Hospitals, Low- income countries, Tanzania