Safeguarding Sixteen and Seventeen-Year-Olds in the Emergency Department: Do Paediatric LED Services Improve Outcomes?

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Background ‘Working together to Safeguard Children’ (2018) is a document outlining government guidance for all professionals working with children. It states that ‘children who need help and protection deserve high quality and effective support as soon as a need is identified’, reminding us that ‘health practitioners are in a strong position to identify welfare needs or safeguarding concerns’.

Paediatric departments regularly manage safeguarding cases; strategies to identify concerns are built into everyday practice. However, as we assume capacity to consent from the age of sixteen, 16 and 17-year-old adolescents may be managed by either adult or paediatric services, therefore could be seen by healthcare professionals with less experience safeguarding children. Nevertheless, concerns must be dealt with promptly and according to national guidance.

Our Emergency Department (ED), an inner-city major trauma centre, previously looked after 16 and 17-year-olds in the adult department. However, due to additional pressures during the COVID-19 pandemic, the paediatric ED has taken over their care.

Objectives To determine if there were improvements in how effectively safeguarding concerns were identified and acted upon when young people (YP) were managed by paediatric ED, compared to adult ED.

To use results to create sustainable change and improve services: firstly by providing targeted education for our workforce; and secondly by designing new ED pathways for YP which enable safeguarding concerns to be effectively managed.

Methods This was a retrospective study of all sixteen and seventeen-year-old patients discussed in ED safeguarding meetings in 2019, and ninety-one in 2020. Patients were identified and their notes reviewed by the auditing team.

Results Our results showed that safeguarding concerns were more effectively managed in 2020 by paediatric services (table 1). The values in table 1 are expressed as percentages of the total for each year. Thirty-three patients were discussed in safeguarding meetings in 2019, and ninety-one in 2020.