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Managing paediatric pain in the emergency department: The way forward.
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Background:

Pain is one of the most common symptoms prompting presentation to the emergency department (ED) . However, the provision of timely pain relief remains a challenge, influenced by a myriad of factors including policy, workload and triage expertise . Despite decades of implementation of evidence-based pain management interventions and initiatives, timely provision of analgesia for children continues to be suboptimal .

Methods:

An integrative literature review was undertaken to understand this problem from a systems perspective and identify a way forward in this important area of research and practice.

Results:

Twenty studies were identified, 18 of which were uncontrolled before and after designs aimed at improving paediatric pain management utilizing multi-faceted interventions. Several studies reported an improvement in key clinical indicators including time to analgesia, provision of analgesia, documentation of pain score, and parent satisfaction. However, in view of the high probability of bias and the heterogeneity of the study designs findings cannot be generalized.

Conclusions:

Paediatric pain management in the ED represents a significant challenge for clinicians. There is a paucity of rigorous studies to guide practice and outcomes tend to focus on clinical indicators rather than the child. Universal acceptance of a thirty-minute benchmark for time to analgesia for a child presenting to ED in pain is questionable. There is little evidence of a systems-based approach to the problem at an organisational level, or collaboration with key stake holders, such as nurses, who are the gatekeepers of pain management. There is also little evidence investigating the role of the parent and child in the pain interaction, despite the successful integration of family centred care in other areas of practice. The way forward in optimizing paediatric pain management in the ED requires consideration of this long-standing problem with a fresh lens to inform innovative research design.