

Abstract

Introduction

Hospital admissions and discharges are important aspects of continuity of care, influencing patients' satisfaction, outcomes, and costs. During transitions of care, communication among all the involved health professionals is especially important. Germany, which historically has a fragmented health system, faces difficulties with intersectoral communication in times of rising hospital stay numbers. This study aims to investigate intersectoral communication as well as the process of hospital admission and discharge from the outpatient specialist physician's perspective.

Method

An exploratory, qualitative study was carried out in Baden-Württemberg, Germany. Interviews were conducted with outpatient specialist physicians and medical assistants using semi-structured interview guides. Interviews were analyzed with the support of the Theoretical Domains Framework (TDF).

Results

Interviews with n=8 outpatient specialist physicians and n=2 medical assistants were conducted. In general, the procedures for hospital admission varied greatly between the practices with some practices always contacting the hospital during patient admission and others never contacting the hospital. After discharge, the same varying process was described. Coding with the TDF showed that social influences, for example personal relationships or established collaborations with hospitals, as well as environmental context and resources, for example the medical infrastructure in the area, were particularly relevant to the interviewees' perception of intersectoral communication.

Discussion

The study only had a small and homogenous sample, limiting the transferability of the results to other settings or groups. Nevertheless, this study provided new insights on intersectoral communication and hospital admission and discharge processes in the German health care system. Further studies should investigate records and documentation as well as the perspective of hospital doctors on intersectoral communication.