

A Human Factors Approach to Improve the Department of Defense's Patient Handoff Protocol

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A Human Factors Approach to Improve the Department of Defense's Patient Handoff Protocols

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ABSTRACT

Patient handoff is a transfer of responsibility and care from one provider to another. An urgent need to improve the effectiveness of handoff protocols is of great concern within most medical facilities. Along with improvements and advanced research in handoff protocols throughout civilian hospitals, there is a dire need to continually improve upon the Department of Defense's procedures. Improved patient care increases mobility, performance, and assists in maintaining the most efficient National Defense. During handoff procedures, information is vulnerable to misinterpretation leading towards higher risk of inaccurate patient care or malpractice. Miscommunication during patient handoffs attributes to 80% of severe medical errors as suggested by the Joint Commission (2012). Handoffs occurring throughout multiple facilities, as common with wounded combat casualties, increase vulnerability to misinterpretation of information leading to even lower quality care. Therefore, continued research is required to determine the most practical and efficient means to safely relay patient information and care through a standardized practice. Successes and failures of communication tactics, such as experienced or top-down patient transfer protocols should be recognized as inefficient for patient handoff responsibility. Development of data driven handoff protocols have proven more beneficial during training and performance than the traditional top-down approach. Testing these data driven protocols within military procedures is imperative to develop standard practices which provide the most beneficial patient care possible for combat casualties. After determining the most effective protocols, research should then proceed to testing in extreme environmental conditions. Ensuring the United States military remains at the highest possible operating status is conducive to their success. Unit mobility and confidence will increase by developing and applying the most successful handoff procedures available to medical military personnel.