

THE AUSTRALASIAN TRIAGE SCALE: A FOCUS ON PEOPLE WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS

BACKGROUND & SIGNIFICANCE

The determination of acuity within an emergency department (ED) is known as Triage. In Australia, the Australasian Triage Scale (ATS) is the tool of choice when conducting the assessment and allocating a triage score. The ATS works quite well for clients who present with physical injury or illness but is not considered so useful for clients who present to ED who have a mental illness. This is significant as the mainstreaming of mental health care resulted in annual increases of 13% - 35% of people who have a mental illness presenting to emergency departments.

STUDY AIM

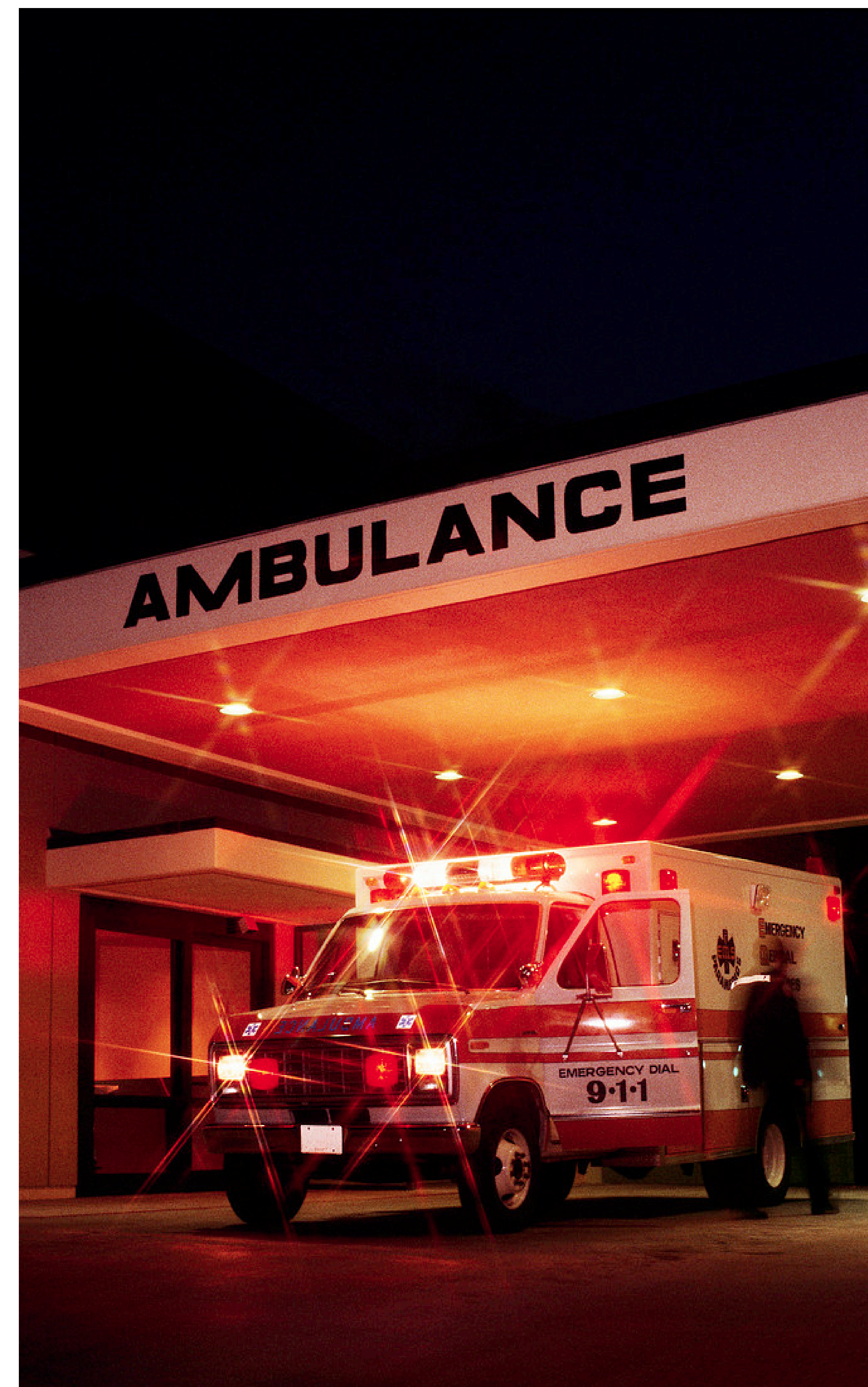
The aim of this study was to better understand the interdisciplinary relationships between mental health nurses and ED triage nurses that are necessary to sustain an emergency mental health triage service to clients presenting with a mental illness.

STUDY DESIGN

Ethnography was the methodology that underpinned this research. Extensive fieldwork, in-depth interviews, observations and document analysis ensured rigorous data collection.

RESULTS

Many factors influence the triage of clients who have a mental illness. The Australasian Triage Scale needs to be reviewed with a view to adopting a national approach to determine the acuity for people who have a mental illness. This vulnerable population are currently not served well by the use of scale that is not representative of their needs. Further, triage nurses need to be up-skilled to be able to accurately assess clients who present to the ED with a mental illness so that this vulnerable population is treated as equitably as those clients who have a physical injury and/or illness.



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