

PRU Conference

On 17th October 2019 “The First Community Emergency Medicine Conference: Breaking down barriers and innovating in integrated emergency care” took place at the Royal Society of Medicine. This event was a collaboration between Barts Health NHS Trust, The Institute of Pre-Hospital Care and London’s Air Ambulance Charity.

The idea for this event stemmed from discussion amongst the Physician Response Unit team, to address some of the current challenges faced by frontline staff working in Urgent and Emergency Care across the nation. The Physician Response Unit has been operational since 2001 and is now a collaboration between London’s Air Ambulance Charity, Barts Health NHS Trust and the London Ambulance Service. It is a rapid response emergency vehicle responding to 999 calls primarily in North East London, with the aim of “taking the Emergency Department to the patient”. The car is staffed by a Higher Specialty Trainee or Consultant in Emergency Medicine and an Emergency Ambulance Crew member from the London Ambulance Service. The car carries a wide range of equipment and medication, including point of care blood tests, a portable ultrasound machine, kit to provide life-saving critical care interventions as well as wound care, urine testing and antibiotics. The service attends a broad range of clinical presentations in both adults and children, and where possible allows the diagnosis and treatment of patients in the community without the need for an Emergency Department attendance or hospital admission.

The concept of Community Emergency Medicine remains in its infancy however has a simple ethos of delivering high quality emergency care in the right place and at the right time for patients. The conference stimulated conversation and idea-generation by bringing together a number of experts in the areas of emergency and pre-hospital care. The programme was split into four sections discussing the challenge of Community Emergency Medicine, the opportunities in Community Emergency Medicine, how to deliver Community Emergency Medicine and different areas of clinical quality.

Delegates were able to hear about the current national agenda in Urgent and Emergency care from the Chair of NHS Improvement, Baroness Dido Harding. They were also able to hear about the daily challenges faced by staff in Emergency Departments nationwide from Dr Katherine Henderson, the President of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, as well as those faced by colleagues in the pre-hospital arena from the Assistant Medical Director for the South East Coast Ambulance Service, Dr Magnus Nelson. Dr Gareth Davies one of the pioneers of Pre-Hospital Emergency Medicine walked delegates through the history of the specialty from its inception until the current day, and they heard from Dr Tim Rogerson, Dr Syed Masud and Dr Tony Joy, who have all been instrumental in developing services similar to the Physician Response Unit in different areas of the country. The first afternoon session focussed on the skills required by the Community Emergency Medicine workforce and was delivered by Professor Colville Laird and this was followed by a multi-disciplinary panel discussion concentrating on developing this workforce. Delegates then heard about different aspects of clinical care for different groups of patients treated in the community, including the older population and high intensity users of emergency services. The day was perfectly finished by Clare Elliott, the wife of a terminally ill patient who was cared for by

the Physician Response Unit and she was able to offer personal insights to the benefits of this model of care.

There is a shared sense that the current challenges facing the Urgent and Emergency Care Sector make it hard to deliver patient-centred care, and delegates from ambulance services, as well as emergency department doctors and nurses, expressed frustration at the intense challenges of their working environment. Community Emergency Medicine enables closer collaboration between acute trusts, ambulance services, and community providers, and allows patients to receive holistic and empowered care in the setting most appropriate for their needs. The workforce benefits, and opportunities for collaborative training and development were also well-recognised.

The conference has been extremely well received with delegates commenting about the “inspirational” nature of the event and stating that it makes them “proud to work in Emergency Medicine”. There are plans to host further events in the future following the evident appetite for further discussion, innovation and collaboration within this increasingly important sub-specialty of Emergency Medicine.