

OBSERVATION FOR GERIATRIC PATIENTS

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There are only a few studies dealing with the geriatric patient in the observation unit (OU).

Admission Rates to an Inpatient Service from the Observation Unit for Geriatric Patients

In four studies, the admission rate to an inpatient service from the OU for geriatric patients was 16%, 17%, 28%, and 29%, respectively.¹⁻⁴ The two studies with the higher admission rates (28% and 29%) are older studies from short stay wards in the United Kingdom, while the other two studies are from OUs in the United States and are more recent (one looked only at chest pain patients, the other included all diagnoses).¹⁻⁴ These admission rates can be compared to the often quoted inpatient rate of 78% from the OU as reported in the Mace et al national survey of OUs in the United States.⁵

Length of Stay

The average length of stay (LOS) for geriatric patients was found to be 15.8 hours in one study, which is comparable to the 15.3 hours noted in the previously mentioned national survey.^{3,5}

Returns to the Emergency Department within Thirty Days

Only one study looked at returns to the emergency department (ED) within thirty days after discharge from the OU for geriatric patients. In this study, none of the adult non-geriatric (age < 65 years) who returned to the ED died; while two of the geriatric (age ≥ 65 years) patients died. These patients died from underlying comorbid conditions that were unrelated to their OU visit.⁴

The Future

The elderly are becoming a larger portion of our population for many reasons including the aging of the “baby boomers”. Currently, the individuals aged 65 years or older comprise approximately one out of ten (12%) of the population; but by 2030 the elderly will comprise about one out of five (21%) of the population.⁶ Preliminary data indicates that the geriatric patient can be effectively managed in an OU. With the anticipated increase in the geriatric population In the future, the OU is likely to have an even greater role in the management of the elderly patient.

References

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