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PSYCHIATRIC EMERGENCY SERVICE USE IN COIMBRA UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS: RESULTS FROM A 6-MONTH CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY SAMPLE

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Aim: The Psychiatric Emergency Service (PES) is an important part of the mental health care system for the management of acute conditions requiring prompt intervention representing also a significant part of workload of specialists and trainees. The objective of this study was to characterize the clinical features of patients observed in PES of Coimbra University Hospitals.

Method: During the first 6 months of 2008, demographic and clinical data were obtained for all patients observed by the first author of the study, together with a specialist in Psychiatry.

Results: The sample consisted of 159 patients, 103 females and 56 males. Mean age was $45,9 \pm 18,367$ years. The majority of patients presented in the emergency room either alone (56,6%) or with a first degree relative (34,6%) by self-initiative and having a past psychiatric history (71,1%). Disturbing mood symptoms (depression, anxiety or both) were the motive of assessment in 58% of patients but several other causes were reported including behavioural symptoms, agitation, psychosis, drug or alcohol related disorders, sleep and cognitive disorders. Average Clinical Global Impression was $4,12 \pm 1,177$. After the psychiatric assessment, several diagnosis were made namely Major Depressive Episode (14,5%), Adaptation Disorders (13,9%), Schizophrenia and related disorders (13,8%), Anxiety Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (11,9%) and Drug or Alcohol related disorders (8,2%). Most patients were discharged without referral (50,3%).

Conclusion: A significant percentage of patients went to the PES for conditions that could have been treated by a primary care physician or in an outpatient clinic setting.