Outreach to community hospitals to improve the emergency care of children

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Nearly 30 million children are cared for in US Emergency Departments (EDs) each year. Most of these children are seen in general, not pediatric, EDs. In its 2006 report, the Institute of Medicine described pediatric emergency care as uneven. Many US EDs do not have the necessary equipment or experience to care for children. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American College of Emergency Physicians agree that tertiary care pediatric centers should serve as resources for consultation and emphasize the need for quality improvement measures and research in pediatric emergency care. There is no proven method of outreach for tertiary care pediatric EDs wishing to reach out to general EDs. However, by studying children who are transferred from general EDs to tertiary care centers, we can gain insight into the needs of general EDs. In one survey, we found that 22% of children transported to a tertiary care ED received less than optimal care prior to transport. The most common diagnoses of these children were asthma, respiratory distress, and fever. In another study, we found that nearly 1/3 of children transported from general EDs were discharged from our ED after transport. Children with trauma and gastrointestinal diagnoses were more likely to be discharged after transport, as were children transported from EDs with lower pediatric volumes and those not staffed by pediatric providers. These results can help tertiary care pediatric EDs design and implement effective outreach programs, with the ultimate goal of improving pediatric emergency care for all children.

Biography
Theresa A Walls is a Pediatric Emergency Medicine physician at Children’s National Health System in Washington, DC. She graduated from Temple University Medical School in 1997 and completed her pediatric residency at Northwestern University in 2000. She received her Master’s in Public Health from Eastern Virginia Medical School in 2005. She finished her fellowship in 2007 and currently works clinically in the emergency department at Children’s National Medical Center while serving as Co-director for Resident Education and coordinating outreach activities to general emergency departments in the greater Washington DC area.

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