

A review of referral triage outcomes based on clinician seniority

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Objectives:

This study aims to evaluate the consistency of referral triaging in OMFS at the Royal Melbourne Dental Hospital, focusing on the impact of clinician seniority on triage outcomes. It seeks to identify whether junior clinicians are more likely to miss high-priority referrals compared to their senior counterparts.

Methods:

A single-centre, retrospective study was conducted using 100 randomly selected triaged referrals from July 2022. Two clinicians of each grade (intern, resident, registrar, consultant) independently assessed the referrals based on departmental guidelines. The results were compared against a pseudo gold standard established by consultant triaging. Inter-rater agreement was measured using Cohen's Kappa statistic.

Results:

The analysis revealed weak inter-rater agreement (Kappa values: interns 0.47-0.50; residents 0.48-0.53; registrars 0.43-0.50) when comparing junior grades to consultants. Intra-grade comparisons showed varied consistency, with residents displaying almost perfect agreement (Kappa 0.96) while registrars showed minimal agreement (Kappa 0.30). Notably, one P1 case was misclassified as routine by all junior staff, emphasising the risk of missed priority referrals.

Conclusion:

The findings indicate significant variability in triage accuracy based on clinician seniority, with junior clinicians less consistent in identifying priority cases. The study underscores the need for enhanced training in triaging protocols and suggests the integration of senior clinician oversight to mitigate discrepancies. Optimising the referral process is crucial for improving patient outcomes and ensuring timely access to care. This review advocates for a collaborative approach in triaging to balance efficiency with the accuracy of patient care management.