

SERVICE DEVELOPMENT OF A PSYCHIATRIC EMERGENCY UNIT WITHIN THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

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AIM

To estimate the demand for a psychiatric emergency unit within the Emergency Department (ED) at St Thomas' Hospital and describe practical considerations in establishing a Standard Operating Procedure for the unit.

BACKGROUND

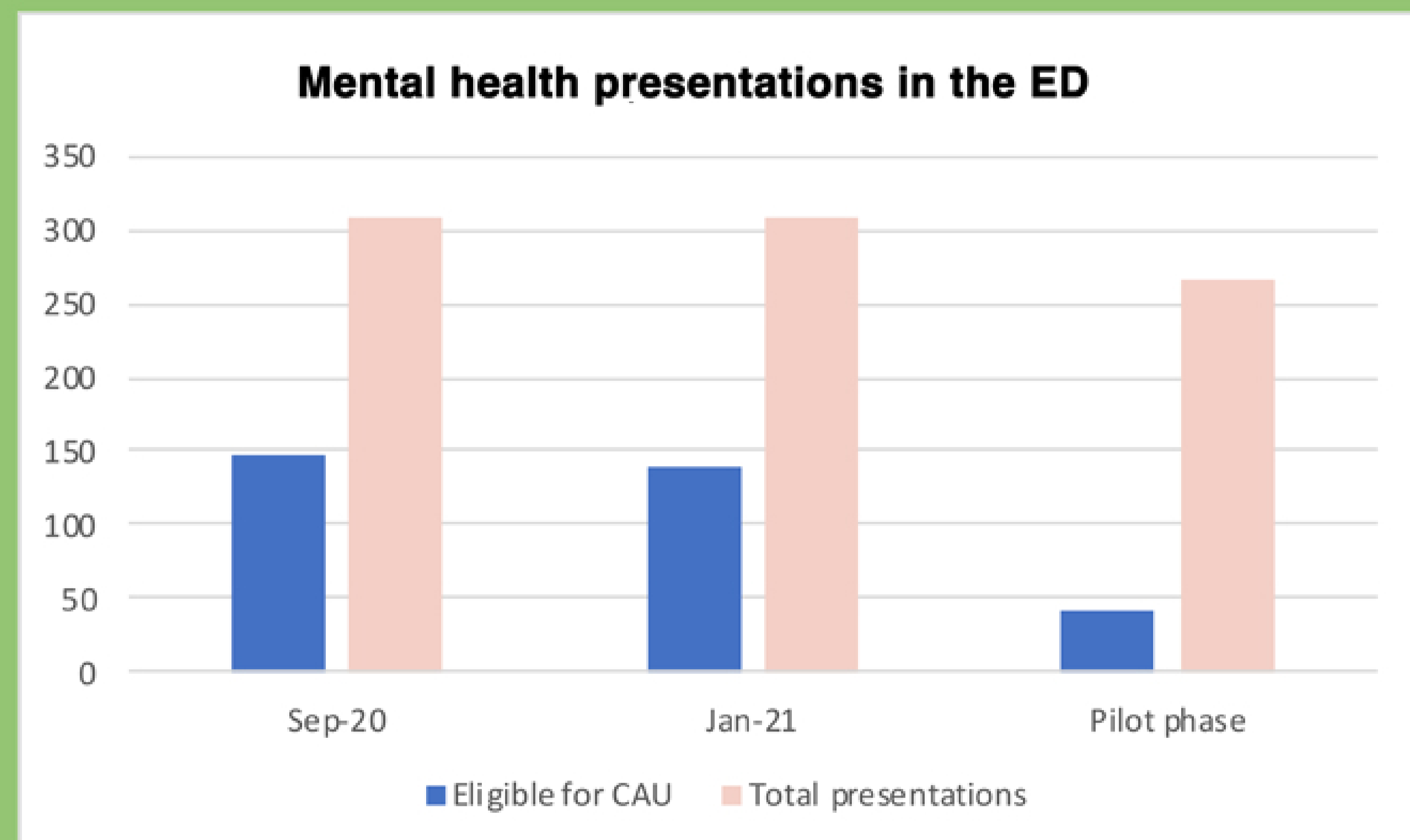
EDs remain the main point of access for patients experiencing psychiatric emergencies although the busy environment is not always conducive to their management. A purpose designed facility to cater to patients without ongoing emergency medical needs could ensure care in a safe, dignified and private setting. We piloted such a unit in February 2021, initially with 2 beds, with a view to increasing the capacity to 6 beds in June.

METHODS

Initially we audited the amount of patients referred by ED to liaison psychiatry in September 2020 and January 2021 to estimate the number of patients who could have been managed in such a unit. We held weekly meetings with senior staff in psychiatry and ED to establish the staffing, prescribing and physical health pathways. We held daily PDSA cycle meetings with acute hospital staff to establish what is working well and what needs to be improved, which have now reduced to twice weekly.

CONCLUSIONS

Potentially about half the number of patients presenting to ED with a mental health emergency could be managed in a psychiatry emergency unit within the emergency floor. The actual number of patients transferred was much smaller, possibly reflecting the smaller bed numbers and the lack of familiarity during the pilot phase. There are practical challenges when trying to move from an ED liaison model to a psychiatry emergency unit model that need to be balanced against opportunities to provide care in a quiet and therapeutic setting.



RESULTS

Out of 308 patients referred to liaison psychiatry in September 2020, 148 (48%) would have met the admission criteria to the unit. Similarly in January 2021, 140 out of 308 patients would have been admitted (45%). Since opening, between 08 February and 08 March 2021, 43 patients out of 265 (16%) were transferred to the unit.

It was agreed that patients in the unit will remain on the ED clock and it will be considered as part of the ED for purposes of the Mental Health Act. The unit is staffed by a band 6 Psychiatric Liaison Nurse, and two band 3 Enhanced Care Nurses. After patients have moved to the unit, the psychiatry on call doctor is responsible for patient care and prescribing out of hours, therefore the unit will close if there is a rota gap. Patients who become medically unwell while in the unit are referred to acute medicine.

Exclusion criteria include CAMHS or OA patients, patients who need medical treatment, patients who are violent and patients under the influence of drugs or alcohol.