Exploring Nursing Work in the Emergency Department

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In recent years, there has been a push for medical institutions to replace paper medical systems with electronic ones, and the majority of institutions have not fully adopted electronic systems. The use of electronic systems requires work to be adapted around the use of computers. I looked at the time distribution behind nursing work in the emergency department at Long Beach Memorial Medical Center, which has been fully electronic for approximately two years, in order to see how nurses work in relation to the electronic systems. After shadowing nurses, I compiled a list of tasks that nurses will carry out while working; these tasks were then organized into broader, but distinct categories. For example, the delivery of patient charts to doctors and the delivery of patient charge sheets to the secretary are both grouped as “paper delivery”. All of the categories are: formal documentation, nursing notes, tangible care, assessments, checkups, tool delivery, paper delivery, transitional notes, department coordination, patient coordination, paper charting, phone communication, handoffs, and other. With the tasks mapped out, I shadowed nurses and tracked their work using a digital pen that timestamps my notes. Approximately 40 hours of data has been recorded and will be analyzed in the upcoming weeks. I will be able to see how time is distributed among the key categories of nurse work. The results will provide groundwork for medical designers to better understand the emergency department. A future project tracking doctors is in plan.