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Characteristics of transitional incidents between hospital and general practice: a survey study

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Background: The primary aim of transitional care is a safe patient transition. However, errors can lead to transitional incidents. Existing literature reports on incidents in either primary or secondary care, however, little is known about the characteristics of transitional incidents. Aim of this study is to identify the characteristics of reported transitional incidents.

Methods: in this survey study, healthcare professionals from three hospitals and 63 general practices in two areas (a rural and urban area) in the Netherlands were asked to describe a transitional incident they had experienced in the past years, using an anonymous digital questionnaire. The incidents were categorized according to the part of the healthcare process in which the incident occurred and harm and potential frequency were classified using a frequency/severity matrix.

Results: From a total of 591 dispersed questionnaires, 69 transitional incidents were reported (response 12%): 35 incidents from the general practice and 34 incidents from the hospital. Most incidents concerned transfer of information from hospital to general practitioner (21%), medication (17%), referral letters by the general practitioner (12%), and discharge procedure (11%). The majority of these transitional incidents did not lead to harm (62%). However, two reported incidents resulted in major harm and one in death.

Conclusions: This study has described characteristics of reported transitional incidents in hospital and general practice setting in the Netherlands and has assessed both location and harm of these transitional incidents. This provides information for potential transitional patient safety improvement plans.