"Treat Them Like a Human Being…They are Somebody's Somebody": Providers' Perspectives on Treating Patients in the Emergency Department After Self-injurious Behavior

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To understand ED providers' perspective on how to best care for individuals who present to US emergency departments (EDs) following self-injurious behavior, purposive recruitment identified nursing directors, medical directors, and social workers (n = 34) for telephone interviews from 17 EDs. Responses and probes to "What is the single most important thing ED providers and staff can do for patients who present to the ED after self-harm?" were analyzed using directed content analysis approach. Qualitative analyses identified four themes: treat patients with respect and compassion; listen carefully and be willing to ask sensitive personal questions; provide appropriate care during mental health crises; connect patients with mental health care. Participants emphasized treating patients who present to the ED after self-injurious behavior with respect and empathy. Hospitals could incentivize provider mental health training, initiatives promoting patient-provider collaboration, and reimbursement strategies ensuring adequate staffing of providers with time to listen carefully.

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