Skin conditions presenting in emergency room in Korea: an eight-year retrospective analysis

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Dermatological patients do visit the emergency department frequently while most skin problems are generally controllable in the outpatient clinic. A retrospective study was conducted using patient data based on dermatological ICD codes rendered in the ED of Seoul National University Boramae Hospital, during an eight-year period from 2003 to 2010. A total of 8,332 patients with skin problem were seen corresponding to 3.2% of total ED visits and approximately 2.9 patients per day. The number of patients had increased from 621 visits in 2003 to 1,719 visits in 2010 with a peak incidence in the summer season annually. The mean age was 29.1 years, and children accounted for 31.2%. Urticaria and angioedema group was most common (68.2%), followed by infections (15.1%) and nonspecific and descriptive diagnosis (6.8%). The mean length of stay in ED was distributed preponderantly around one hour while total ED patients stayed for 2 hours or more. In 6.2% cases, the patient was admitted (n=515), most frequently for infection group (56.3%). Dermatological ED patients increased at a steeper rate than total ED patients (277% vs 162%). However, the severity of dermatological problems in ED decreased with respect to admission rate, death rate, length of stay and visiting-admitting discordance. Health policy makers could utilize these basic data to amend the current health delivery system to reduce unnecessary expenditure of medical resources.

Key Words: Skin problem, Emergency department, Urticaria, Cellulitis, Overcrowding