



## Emergency Nursing Interventions in Sepsis Management: Reducing Time to Antibiotic Administration

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### Abstract

This review critically examines the role of emergency nursing interventions in enhancing the timeliness of antibiotic administration in patients presenting with sepsis. Recognizing sepsis as a time-sensitive and life-threatening condition, the study aims to synthesize existing evidence on clinical, organizational, and technological strategies that reduce delays in treatment initiation within emergency care settings. A structured narrative review approach was adopted, drawing on empirical studies, systematic reviews, and quality improvement reports to evaluate key interventions influencing time-to-antibiotic delivery.

The findings demonstrate that early identification through structured triage protocols and nurse-led screening tools significantly improves recognition of sepsis and accelerates clinical response. Nurse-initiated protocols and standing orders were shown to reduce reliance on hierarchical decision-making, thereby enabling more rapid initiation of antibiotic therapy. Additionally, workflow optimization and interdisciplinary collaboration were identified as critical factors in minimizing delays, particularly when supported by digital health systems and data-driven clinical decision tools. Emerging innovations, including artificial intelligence and predictive analytics, further enhance early detection and facilitate proactive intervention.

However, the review also identifies persistent barriers, including diagnostic uncertainty, workflow inefficiencies, and variability in clinical practice, which continue to impede optimal care delivery. Despite these challenges, evidence consistently indicates that reducing time to antibiotic administration is associated with improved patient outcomes, including lower mortality and reduced healthcare resource utilization.

In conclusion, timely antibiotic administration in sepsis requires a multifaceted and integrated approach that combines nursing leadership, standardized protocols, and technological innovation. It is recommended that healthcare systems prioritize nurse-driven interventions, invest in digital infrastructure, and strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration. Future research should focus on refining predictive technologies, standardizing clinical metrics, and addressing implementation challenges across diverse healthcare settings.

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### 1. Introduction

Sepsis remains a major global health concern, characterized by life-threatening organ dysfunction resulting from a dysregulated host response to infection. Despite advances in critical care and antimicrobial therapy, sepsis continues to be associated with substantial morbidity, mortality, and healthcare burden worldwide. The emergency department (ED) represents a critical point of entry for many patients with sepsis, where timely recognition and prompt initiation of treatment significantly influence clinical

outcomes. Among the core therapeutic interventions, the rapid administration of appropriate antimicrobial therapy has consistently been identified as a cornerstone of effective sepsis management (Seymour *et al.*, 2017; Liu *et al.*, 2017). The concept of time-sensitive management in sepsis has gained considerable attention over the past two decades, largely driven by evidence demonstrating a strong association between delays in antibiotic administration and increased mortality. Early landmark and contemporary studies have emphasized that each hour of delay in initiating antibiotic therapy may lead to a measurable increase in the risk of death, particularly in patients with severe sepsis or septic shock (Sterling *et al.*, 2015; Seymour *et al.*, 2017). This has led to the widespread adoption of clinical guidelines advocating for the administration of broad-spectrum antibiotics as soon as sepsis is recognized, often within a recommended window of one hour. However, the practical implementation of this target in busy emergency settings remains challenging and subject to ongoing debate (Weinberger, Rhee & Klompas, 2020).

Systematic reviews and meta-analyses have sought to clarify the relationship between antibiotic timing and patient outcomes, yet findings have not always been entirely consistent. Sterling *et al.* (2015), in a comprehensive meta-analysis, reported that while early antibiotic administration is generally associated with improved survival, the strength of this relationship varies depending on the definition of “time zero” and the severity of illness. Similarly, Rothrock *et al.* (2020) compared immediate versus early antibiotic administration and found that although earlier treatment trends toward better outcomes, the magnitude of benefit may differ across patient populations and clinical contexts. These variations underscore the complexity of sepsis as a heterogeneous syndrome and highlight the need for nuanced clinical decision-making.

Further complicating the issue is the balance between urgency and appropriateness of therapy. While rapid administration is crucial, the selection of appropriate empiric antibiotics tailored to the suspected source of infection is equally important. Sherwin *et al.* (2017) emphasized that both timeliness and appropriateness of antimicrobial therapy contribute to improved outcomes in emergency department patients with severe sepsis or septic shock. Inadequate or inappropriate antibiotic selection, even if administered promptly, may fail to achieve the desired therapeutic effect, thereby diminishing the benefits of early intervention.

The emergency department environment presents unique challenges that can impede the timely delivery of antibiotics. High patient volumes, diagnostic uncertainty, and competing clinical priorities often contribute to delays in sepsis recognition and treatment initiation. Weinberger, Rhee, and Klompas (2020) critically analyzed the existing literature and highlighted that inconsistencies in defining sepsis onset and variability in clinical workflows can significantly influence measured time-to-antibiotic intervals. These findings suggest that improving outcomes in sepsis requires not only adherence to time-based targets but also systemic improvements in clinical processes and diagnostic accuracy. Within this context, emergency nurses play a pivotal role in the early identification and management of sepsis. As frontline healthcare providers, nurses are often the first to assess patients upon arrival in the emergency department, making them uniquely positioned to recognize early signs of sepsis and initiate timely interventions. Evidence from

interventional studies demonstrates that nurse-led initiatives, including sepsis screening protocols and nurse-initiated treatment pathways, can significantly reduce time to antibiotic administration and improve adherence to sepsis bundles (Tromp *et al.*, 2010; Bruce *et al.*, 2015). These findings highlight the critical contribution of nursing practice to the overall effectiveness of sepsis care.

The implementation of structured sepsis protocols and bundles has emerged as a key strategy for improving timeliness of care. Kalich *et al.* (2016) demonstrated that the introduction of an antibiotic-specific sepsis bundle in the emergency department led to significant improvements in both the appropriateness and timing of antibiotic administration. Similarly, the use of standardized screening tools has been shown to facilitate earlier recognition of sepsis, thereby enabling more rapid initiation of treatment. Shah, Sterk and Rech (2018) reported that the implementation of an emergency department sepsis screening tool significantly decreased time to antibiotic administration, reinforcing the importance of systematic approaches in optimizing clinical workflows.

In addition to protocol-driven interventions, large-scale observational studies have provided robust evidence linking timely treatment to improved patient outcomes. Seymour *et al.* (2017), in a landmark study involving mandated emergency care protocols, found that shorter time to antibiotic administration was associated with lower in-hospital mortality. Likewise, Liu *et al.* (2017) demonstrated that delays in antibiotic therapy were independently associated with increased mortality among patients with sepsis, further reinforcing the critical importance of early intervention. These findings collectively support the notion that reducing time to antibiotics is not merely a process metric but a clinically meaningful determinant of patient survival.

Nevertheless, ongoing debates persist regarding the optimal timing threshold for antibiotic administration. Johnston *et al.* (2017) highlighted that while immediate administration is generally beneficial, the evidence does not uniformly support a strict one-hour target across all patient groups. Instead, the authors advocate for a balanced approach that considers both the urgency of treatment and the need for accurate diagnosis and appropriate antibiotic selection. This perspective aligns with the broader movement toward individualized patient care, recognizing that rigid adherence to time-based metrics may not always be feasible or clinically appropriate.

Given the complexity of sepsis management and the critical importance of timely antibiotic therapy, there is a growing need to explore targeted interventions that can effectively reduce delays in emergency settings. In particular, the role of emergency nursing interventions in facilitating early recognition, streamlining workflows, and initiating treatment warrants comprehensive examination. By synthesizing current evidence on time-to-antibiotic administration and highlighting the contributions of nursing practice, this review aims to provide a nuanced understanding of strategies to optimize sepsis care in the emergency department.

### 1.1. Background and Clinical Significance of Sepsis

Sepsis is a complex and life-threatening clinical syndrome arising from a dysregulated host response to infection, leading to widespread inflammation, tissue damage, and organ dysfunction. It represents a critical medical emergency that demands rapid recognition and intervention due to its

potential for rapid progression and high fatality rates. The condition spans a broad clinical spectrum, ranging from early infection with subtle physiological changes to severe sepsis and septic shock, characterized by profound circulatory and metabolic abnormalities.

Globally, sepsis constitutes a major public health challenge, contributing significantly to hospital admissions, intensive care utilization, and healthcare expenditures. Its burden is particularly pronounced in emergency care settings, where timely identification can be difficult due to nonspecific presenting symptoms and overlapping clinical features with other conditions. This diagnostic complexity often leads to delays in treatment, which can adversely affect patient outcomes.

The clinical significance of sepsis lies not only in its high mortality but also in its long-term consequences among survivors, including persistent organ dysfunction and reduced quality of life. As such, sepsis management has become a priority within healthcare systems, emphasizing early detection, rapid therapeutic intervention, and coordinated multidisciplinary care to improve survival and reduce complications.

### 1.2. Importance of Timely Antibiotic Administration

Timely antibiotic administration constitutes a fundamental component of effective sepsis management, reflecting the time-critical nature of this condition and its rapid progression toward organ dysfunction and mortality. Early initiation of appropriate antimicrobial therapy is widely recognized as a decisive factor in improving clinical outcomes, as delays allow for continued microbial proliferation and exacerbation of the host's inflammatory response. Consequently, prompt antibiotic delivery is not merely a therapeutic step but a life-saving intervention that directly influences survival trajectories in septic patients.

Clinical and quality improvement evidence consistently underscores the importance of minimizing delays in antibiotic administration within emergency settings. Gatewood *et al.* (2015) demonstrated that targeted quality improvement initiatives aimed at enhancing early sepsis care significantly reduced time to treatment and improved adherence to recommended care processes. Such findings reinforce the notion that structured interventions can effectively address systemic inefficiencies that contribute to treatment delays.

Moreover, the integration of standardized protocols has been shown to facilitate rapid antibiotic delivery. Bruce *et al.* (2015) reported that nurse-initiated sepsis protocols in the emergency department led to improved compliance with sepsis bundles and a notable reduction in time to initial antibiotic administration, alongside improvements in patient outcomes. This highlights the critical role of coordinated clinical pathways in ensuring timely care.

From a therapeutic perspective, early antibiotic administration must also be guided by considerations of appropriateness and spectrum of coverage. Martínez *et al.* (2020) emphasize that prompt initiation of empiric broad-spectrum antibiotics, followed by timely reassessment and de-escalation, is essential to balance immediate clinical needs with antimicrobial stewardship principles. Collectively, these insights affirm that reducing time to antibiotics is central to optimizing sepsis management and improving patient survival.

### 1.3. Role of Emergency Nursing in Sepsis Care

Emergency nursing plays a pivotal role in the early recognition and management of sepsis, positioning nurses at the forefront of time-critical interventions that significantly influence patient outcomes. Within the dynamic and high-pressure environment of the emergency department, nurses are often the first healthcare professionals to assess patients, making their clinical judgment essential for identifying early signs of sepsis and initiating appropriate care pathways. This frontline responsibility underscores the importance of nursing vigilance, rapid assessment skills, and adherence to evidence-based protocols.

The contribution of emergency nurses extends beyond initial assessment to active participation in quality improvement initiatives aimed at optimizing sepsis care. Gatewood *et al.* (2015) demonstrated that structured quality improvement programs within the emergency department significantly enhanced early sepsis recognition and treatment processes. Nurses, as key drivers of these initiatives, facilitate timely interventions by ensuring adherence to clinical guidelines and coordinating multidisciplinary responses.

Furthermore, targeted interventions led or supported by nursing staff have been shown to reduce delays in antibiotic administration. Emerson *et al.* (2019) highlighted that focused efforts to streamline emergency department workflows, often involving nursing-led strategies, resulted in decreased time to antibiotic delivery for patients with sepsis. These findings emphasize the operational impact of nursing roles in improving efficiency and patient care timelines.

In addition to process improvements, the clinical implications of nursing actions are closely linked to patient outcomes. Sherwin *et al.* (2017) underscored the importance of early and appropriate antibiotic administration in reducing mortality among patients with severe sepsis and septic shock, reinforcing the critical role of nurses in facilitating timely treatment. Collectively, these perspectives affirm that emergency nurses are integral to the successful management of sepsis, bridging clinical assessment, rapid intervention, and coordinated care delivery.

### 1.4. Aim, Objectives, Purpose, and Scope of the Review

This review aims to critically examine emergency nursing interventions in the management of sepsis, with a particular focus on strategies that reduce the time to antibiotic administration. Given the time-sensitive nature of sepsis and its significant impact on patient outcomes, this review seeks to synthesize current evidence and provide a comprehensive understanding of how nursing practices within emergency settings can enhance the timeliness and effectiveness of care. The primary objectives of this review are threefold. First, to explore the clinical and operational factors influencing delays in antibiotic administration in patients presenting with sepsis in emergency departments. Second, to evaluate the role of emergency nurses in early recognition, initiation of treatment, and coordination of care processes that contribute to reduced treatment timelines. Third, to identify and analyze evidence-based interventions, including protocols, screening tools, and workflow optimization strategies, that support rapid antibiotic delivery.

The purpose of this review is to bridge the gap between clinical evidence and practical application by highlighting actionable nursing strategies that can be implemented in emergency care settings. It also aims to contribute to ongoing

quality improvement efforts by informing policy development, clinical guidelines, and educational initiatives focused on sepsis management.

The scope of this review encompasses studies and evidence related to adult patients presenting with sepsis in emergency departments, with particular emphasis on nursing-led or nursing-influenced interventions. It focuses on time-to-antibiotic administration as a key performance indicator while also considering broader implications for patient outcomes, healthcare efficiency, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

## 2. Pathophysiology and Clinical Recognition of Sepsis in Emergency Settings

Sepsis is a complex and dynamic clinical syndrome characterized by a dysregulated host response to infection, leading to life-threatening organ dysfunction. Its pathophysiology involves an intricate interplay between pro-inflammatory and anti-inflammatory processes, endothelial dysfunction, and alterations in microcirculatory flow. These mechanisms collectively contribute to impaired tissue perfusion, cellular hypoxia, and ultimately, multi-organ failure if not promptly addressed. In emergency settings, where patients often present at varying stages of disease progression, understanding these underlying mechanisms is essential for timely recognition and intervention.

At the core of sepsis pathophysiology is the host's immune response to invading pathogens. Upon infection, the body activates innate immune pathways, leading to the release of inflammatory mediators such as cytokines and chemokines. While this response is initially protective, an exaggerated or dysregulated reaction can result in widespread inflammation and collateral tissue damage. This systemic inflammatory state disrupts vascular integrity, increases capillary permeability, and promotes coagulation abnormalities, all of which contribute to organ dysfunction. The progression from localized infection to systemic involvement can occur rapidly, underscoring the need for early detection in emergency care environments (Almutairi *et al.*, 2024; Kuponyi & Akomolafe, 2024; Taiwo *et al.*, 2024).

In addition to inflammatory dysregulation, sepsis is associated with significant alterations in cardiovascular and metabolic function. Vasodilation and increased vascular permeability lead to hypotension and reduced effective circulating volume, impairing oxygen delivery to vital organs. Concurrently, mitochondrial dysfunction and metabolic derangements further compromise cellular energy production. These pathophysiological changes manifest clinically as altered mental status, tachycardia, hypotension, and signs of organ impairment, which may initially be subtle and easily overlooked in busy emergency departments. Consequently, early recognition requires a high index of suspicion and systematic assessment approaches.

Clinical recognition of sepsis in emergency settings is particularly challenging due to its heterogeneous presentation. Patients may present with nonspecific symptoms such as fever, malaise, or confusion, which can mimic other acute conditions. This diagnostic ambiguity often contributes to delays in treatment initiation. Hill (2024) emphasizes that variability in clinical presentation and the absence of a single definitive diagnostic marker necessitate the use of structured screening tools and clinical judgment to identify at-risk patients promptly. Early identification is critical, as delays in recognition are directly associated with

prolonged time to antibiotic administration and poorer patient outcomes.

Nurses play a central role in the clinical recognition of sepsis, particularly in the initial stages of patient assessment. As frontline healthcare providers, they are responsible for monitoring vital signs, identifying early warning indicators, and escalating care when sepsis is suspected. Schorr (2016) highlights that nursing-driven screening and early intervention strategies can significantly improve patient outcomes by facilitating rapid diagnosis and timely treatment. The integration of standardized screening protocols into routine clinical practice has been shown to enhance the detection of sepsis and reduce variability in care delivery.

The implementation of nurse-driven tools and protocols has further strengthened the capacity for early recognition in emergency settings. Hill (2024) demonstrates that structured nursing interventions, including sepsis screening checklists and rapid response triggers, can significantly reduce delays in antibiotic administration by enabling earlier identification of septic patients. Similarly, Semanco, Wright and Rich (2022) report that nurse-driven rapid response team protocols improve initial sepsis management by promoting timely escalation and coordinated care. These approaches highlight the importance of empowering nursing staff with the tools and authority needed to act swiftly in suspected cases of sepsis.

Organizational factors within emergency departments also play a critical role in shaping the timeliness of sepsis recognition. Natsch *et al.* (2000) found that improvements in clinical organization and the implementation of specific guidelines led to earlier initiation of antibiotic treatment in patients with severe infections. This underscores the importance of structured workflows and clear clinical pathways in facilitating early diagnosis and intervention. In high-acuity environments, where competing priorities and time pressures are common, streamlined processes are essential to ensure that sepsis is promptly identified and managed.

In pediatric and specialized populations, similar principles apply, with adaptations to meet specific clinical needs. Lukes, Schjodt and Struwe (2019) demonstrated that the implementation of a nursing-based order set significantly improved antibiotic administration times in pediatric emergency patients with fever and neutropenia. Although this population differs from typical adult sepsis cases, the findings reinforce the broader concept that standardized nursing interventions can enhance early recognition and treatment across diverse clinical contexts.

Beyond the emergency department, the integration of sepsis recognition into broader hospital systems has shown promise in improving outcomes. Khanina *et al.* (2020) reported that leveraging existing medical emergency response systems can enhance sepsis care for hospital inpatients by facilitating early identification and timely intervention. These findings suggest that a systems-based approach that integrates both emergency and inpatient care pathways is essential to optimize sepsis management.

Despite these advancements, challenges in clinical recognition persist. Variability in clinician experience, differences in patient presentation, and limitations in diagnostic tools continue to hinder early identification. Furthermore, the overlap of sepsis symptoms with other acute conditions can complicate decision-making, particularly in

resource-constrained settings. Addressing these challenges requires ongoing education, training, and the adoption of evidence-based screening tools to support clinical judgment.

### 3. Emergency Nursing Interventions to Reduce Time to Antibiotic Administration

The reduction of time to antibiotic administration in sepsis remains a critical priority in emergency care, given its direct association with patient survival and clinical outcomes. Emergency nursing interventions are central to achieving this objective, as nurses function at the interface of early recognition, rapid decision-making, and coordinated treatment delivery. Contemporary evidence highlights that structured, nurse-led approaches—when integrated with technological innovations—can significantly enhance the timeliness and effectiveness of sepsis management (Seymour *et al.*, 2017; Ferguson *et al.*, 2019).

Nurse-directed sepsis care models represent one of the most effective strategies for minimizing delays in antibiotic administration. These models empower nurses to initiate early interventions based on predefined clinical criteria, thereby bypassing potential delays associated with traditional hierarchical workflows. Ferguson *et al.* (2019) emphasize that such approaches facilitate rapid clinical action, ensuring that patients receive timely and evidence-based care. This proactive engagement is particularly critical in high-acuity emergency environments, where even minimal delays can have profound clinical consequences.

The integration of triage-based sepsis alerts further strengthens early intervention efforts. By embedding screening tools into the initial patient assessment, nurses can identify sepsis at the earliest point of contact and activate appropriate care pathways. Hayden *et al.* (2016) demonstrated that triage sepsis alerts, combined with standardized protocols, significantly reduced time to both fluid resuscitation and antibiotic administration. This highlights the importance of early recognition as a precursor to timely treatment and underscores the value of nurse-led triage systems in accelerating care delivery.

Process optimization within the emergency department is equally vital in reducing treatment delays. Interventions such as predefined order sets, streamlined communication channels, and improved medication accessibility have been shown to enhance efficiency and reduce door-to-antibiotic time. Hitti *et al.* (2012) reported that targeted workflow improvements led to significant reductions in treatment delays for severely septic patients. Similarly, Lorch (2018) found that the implementation of comprehensive sepsis management protocols contributed to more consistent and timely antibiotic administration. These findings underscore the importance of structured clinical pathways in minimizing variability and ensuring prompt care.

Quality improvement initiatives further reinforce the effectiveness of these interventions by fostering a culture of continuous evaluation and refinement. Murray (2022) demonstrated that evidence-based quality improvement projects targeting specific patient populations can lead to sustained reductions in antibiotic administration times. Such initiatives often involve multidisciplinary collaboration, performance monitoring, and ongoing staff education, all of which are essential for maintaining high standards of sepsis care.

In recent years, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital health technologies has emerged as a promising

avenue for enhancing emergency nursing interventions. AI-driven systems can support early identification of sepsis, predict patient deterioration, and optimize clinical decision-making processes. Sagay *et al.* (2024) and Taiwoet al. (2024) highlight the potential of AI to predict patient outcomes and guide treatment planning, thereby enabling more timely and targeted interventions. By providing real-time clinical insights, these technologies can assist nurses in prioritizing high-risk patients and initiating appropriate care without delay.

Similarly, the application of AI in broader healthcare contexts has demonstrated its capacity to improve disease management and streamline clinical workflows. Ezech *et al.* (2024) and Taiwoet al. (2024) emphasize that AI-driven tools can enhance the efficiency of care delivery by automating routine processes, supporting clinical decision-making, and facilitating timely interventions. In the context of sepsis management, such innovations can complement traditional nursing practices by reducing cognitive burden and enabling more rapid responses to clinical deterioration.

The clinical significance of reducing time to antibiotics is further supported by large-scale observational studies. Seymour *et al.* (2017) established a clear association between shorter time to antibiotic administration and reduced in-hospital mortality, reinforcing the urgency of timely intervention. Burrell *et al.* (2016) similarly underscored the importance of early treatment in improving survival outcomes, emphasizing that prompt recognition and intervention are fundamental to effective sepsis care.

Central to the success of these interventions is the role of emergency nurses as coordinators of care. Nurses facilitate communication among multidisciplinary team members, ensure adherence to clinical protocols, and monitor patient responses to treatment. Their ability to integrate clinical expertise with protocol-driven care enables the rapid translation of evidence into practice, thereby reducing delays and improving patient outcomes.

Despite these advancements, challenges remain in the consistent implementation of interventions aimed at reducing time to antibiotic administration. Variability in institutional resources, differences in workflow design, and competing clinical priorities can hinder the effectiveness of sepsis protocols. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive, systems-based approach that integrates clinical expertise, technological innovation, and organizational support.

#### 3.1. Early Identification and Triage Protocols

Early identification and triage protocols are fundamental to reducing time to antibiotic administration in patients with sepsis, particularly within the fast-paced environment of the emergency department. Prompt recognition at the point of entry enables rapid initiation of treatment pathways, thereby minimizing delays that may adversely affect patient outcomes. Structured triage systems, supported by standardized screening tools, have been shown to enhance the early detection of sepsis and facilitate timely clinical decision-making.

Evidence-based initiatives such as “Code Sepsis” demonstrate the effectiveness of integrating early identification protocols into emergency care workflows. Macalintal (2016) highlights that the implementation of structured screening criteria and rapid response mechanisms significantly improves early recognition and expedites

intervention. Similarly, targeted protocols in specific patient populations, such as pediatric patients with fever and neutropenia, have proven effective in reducing time to antibiotic administration by streamlining triage and treatment processes (Cohen *et al.*, 2016).

Advancements in digital health and artificial intelligence (AI) have further strengthened early identification strategies. AI-driven systems are increasingly being utilized to detect subtle clinical patterns and predict disease onset, thereby supporting more accurate and timely triage decisions. Sagay *et al.* (2024) emphasize that AI-based approaches can enhance early detection by analyzing complex patient data and identifying high-risk individuals before clinical deterioration becomes apparent. In a broader context, Omolayo *et al.* (2024) demonstrate the potential of advanced machine learning models in epidemic surveillance, highlighting their applicability in identifying emerging health threats and informing early intervention strategies.

### 3.2. Nurse-Initiated Sepsis Protocols and Standing Orders

Nurse-initiated sepsis protocols and standing orders represent a critical advancement in the timely management of sepsis within emergency and acute care settings. These protocols empower nurses to initiate key diagnostic and therapeutic interventions, including the administration of antibiotics, without awaiting direct physician orders, thereby significantly reducing treatment delays. Given the well-established association between delayed antibiotic therapy and increased mortality, such approaches are essential in optimizing patient outcomes (Sterling *et al.*, 2015).

The effectiveness of nurse-led protocols lies in their ability to streamline clinical workflows and facilitate rapid decision-making. By utilizing predefined criteria for sepsis identification, nurses can activate standing orders that include blood cultures, laboratory investigations, and immediate initiation of empiric antibiotic therapy. Martínez *et al.* (2020) emphasize that early administration of broad-spectrum antibiotics is a cornerstone of sepsis management, and protocols that support prompt initiation are vital for controlling infection and preventing progression to severe organ dysfunction.

Empirical evidence supports the impact of nurse-initiated interventions in reducing time to antibiotic administration. Mattison *et al.* (2016) demonstrated that the implementation of a nurse-led protocol significantly improved the time to first intravenous antibiotic dose in septic patients following chemotherapy. This highlights the capacity of nursing-led initiatives to overcome systemic delays and enhance the efficiency of care delivery.

### 3.3. Workflow Optimization and Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Workflow optimization and interdisciplinary collaboration are essential components in reducing time to antibiotic administration in sepsis management, particularly within the complex and high-demand environment of the emergency department. Efficient workflows ensure that clinical processes—from patient triage to treatment initiation—are streamlined, coordinated, and free from unnecessary delays. When combined with effective collaboration among healthcare professionals, these systems significantly enhance the timeliness and quality of care delivery.

Digital transformation has emerged as a key enabler of workflow efficiency in healthcare settings. Ezech *et al.* (2022)

highlight that digitizing healthcare workflows can reduce administrative bottlenecks and improve coordination across care teams, thereby facilitating faster clinical decision-making. Similarly, Fasasi (2023) emphasizes that optimized workflow structures enhance operational efficiency by minimizing redundancies and improving communication pathways. These improvements are particularly relevant in sepsis care, where delays in communication or task execution can directly impact patient outcomes.

Interdisciplinary collaboration further strengthens these efforts by fostering coordinated action among nurses, physicians, pharmacists, and laboratory personnel. Sakyi *et al.* (2024) note that digital transformation in service delivery supports integrated care models, enabling real-time information sharing and collaborative decision-making. Additionally, the incorporation of advanced technologies, including predictive analytics and decision-support systems, has been shown to enhance clinical coordination and responsiveness (Taiwo *et al.*, 2022; Gado *et al.*, 2022; Kuponiyi, Akomolafe & Omotayo, 2023).

The clinical importance of such coordinated approaches is underscored by evidence linking timely and appropriate antibiotic administration to improved patient outcomes. Rothrock *et al.* (2020) demonstrate that earlier antibiotic delivery is associated with better outcomes in severe sepsis and septic shock, while Sherwin *et al.* (2017) emphasize the combined importance of timeliness and appropriateness in reducing mortality. Collectively, these findings reinforce that optimized workflows and strong interdisciplinary collaboration are critical in ensuring rapid, effective sepsis management.

### 4. Barriers to Timely Antibiotic Administration in Emergency Departments

Despite the well-established importance of early antibiotic administration in sepsis management, numerous barriers continue to impede timely delivery within emergency departments. These barriers are multifactorial, encompassing clinical, organizational, and systemic challenges that collectively contribute to delays in treatment initiation. Understanding these constraints is essential for developing targeted interventions that enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of sepsis care.

One of the most significant challenges in timely antibiotic administration is diagnostic uncertainty. Sepsis is characterized by a heterogeneous clinical presentation, often manifesting with nonspecific symptoms that overlap with other acute conditions. This variability complicates early recognition and may delay the initiation of appropriate treatment. Weinberger, Rhee, and Klompas (2020) highlight that inconsistencies in defining “time zero” for sepsis onset and variability in clinical assessment contribute to delays in antibiotic administration. The absence of a definitive diagnostic marker further exacerbates this issue, requiring clinicians to rely heavily on clinical judgment, which may vary across practitioners.

Closely related to diagnostic challenges is the ongoing debate regarding the optimal timing of antibiotic administration. Johnston *et al.* (2017), in a systematic review and meta-analysis, found that while early antibiotic administration is generally beneficial, the evidence supporting immediate administration within a strict timeframe is not universally consistent. This lack of consensus can create uncertainty among clinicians, potentially leading to hesitation or delays

in initiating treatment, particularly in cases where the diagnosis of sepsis is not definitive.

Organizational and workflow-related factors also play a critical role in delaying antibiotic administration. Emergency departments are often characterized by high patient volumes, overcrowding, and limited resources, all of which can hinder timely care delivery. Inefficient workflows, fragmented communication, and delays in diagnostic testing or medication availability can further prolong the time to treatment. Kalich *et al.* (2016) demonstrated that the implementation of an antibiotic-specific sepsis bundle improved both the appropriateness and timeliness of antibiotic administration, suggesting that before such interventions, workflow inefficiencies were a major contributor to delays.

In addition to systemic issues, human factors, including knowledge gaps and variability in clinical practice, contribute to delays in sepsis management. Tromp *et al.* (2010) identified that differences in nursing recognition and response to sepsis significantly impact the timeliness of treatment. Without standardized training and protocols, early signs of sepsis may be overlooked, delaying escalation and intervention. Similarly, the absence of clear role delineation within the multidisciplinary team can result in uncertainty regarding responsibility for initiating treatment.

The lack of standardized screening tools and protocols further exacerbates these challenges. Shah, Sterk, and Rech (2018) demonstrated that the introduction of a sepsis screening tool in the emergency department significantly reduced time to antibiotic administration, indicating that prior delays were partly attributable to inconsistent identification processes. Without such tools, reliance on subjective clinical judgment can lead to variability in care and missed opportunities for early intervention.

Moreover, delays may arise from hierarchical decision-making structures within healthcare settings. In traditional models, nurses may need to await physician orders before initiating antibiotics, which can prolong treatment timelines. Bruce *et al.* (2015) showed that nurse-initiated sepsis protocols improved compliance with sepsis bundles and reduced time to antibiotic administration, highlighting that previous delays were linked to limitations in nursing autonomy and procedural inefficiencies.

Another important barrier is the coordination of multidisciplinary care. Effective sepsis management requires collaboration among nurses, physicians, pharmacists, and laboratory personnel. Breakdowns in communication or delays in information exchange can significantly impact the timeliness of treatment. For instance, delays in laboratory results or challenges in obtaining intravenous access and preparing medications can contribute to prolonged time to antibiotic administration. These coordination challenges are particularly pronounced in busy emergency departments where multiple critical patients compete for attention and resources.

The clinical consequences of these delays are substantial. Seymour *et al.* (2017) demonstrated that increased time to treatment is associated with higher in-hospital mortality among patients with sepsis, underscoring the critical importance of addressing barriers to timely care. Delays not only worsen patient outcomes but also increase the burden on healthcare systems through prolonged hospital stays and increased resource utilization.

Furthermore, balancing the urgency of antibiotic

administration with the principles of antimicrobial stewardship presents an additional challenge. Clinicians may hesitate to administer broad-spectrum antibiotics without sufficient diagnostic certainty, fearing the potential consequences of overuse, such as antimicrobial resistance. This tension between rapid intervention and appropriate antibiotic selection can contribute to delays, particularly in cases where the clinical picture is ambiguous.

## 5. Strategies and Innovations to Improve Timeliness

Improving the timeliness of antibiotic administration in sepsis requires a multifaceted approach that integrates clinical protocols, organizational restructuring, and technological innovation. Given the time-sensitive nature of sepsis, healthcare systems must adopt evidence-based strategies that enhance early recognition, streamline workflows, and facilitate rapid treatment initiation. Contemporary research highlights that combining traditional clinical interventions with emerging digital health technologies offers significant potential to reduce delays and improve patient outcomes.

One of the foundational strategies for improving timeliness is the implementation of structured clinical guidelines and organizational interventions within emergency departments. Early work by Natsch *et al.* (2000) demonstrated that the introduction of specific guidelines and improvements in clinical organization significantly reduced delays in antibiotic initiation for severe infections. These findings underscore the importance of standardized care pathways in ensuring consistency and efficiency in clinical practice. By clearly defining roles, responsibilities, and treatment timelines, such guidelines minimize ambiguity and support rapid decision-making.

Nurse-driven interventions have also emerged as a critical component in optimizing sepsis care. Empowering nurses to initiate sepsis protocols and activate rapid response systems has been shown to significantly reduce time to antibiotic administration. Semanco, Wright, and Rich (2022) reported that the implementation of a nurse-driven rapid response team protocol improved the timeliness of initial sepsis management, highlighting the value of proactive nursing engagement. Similarly, Lukes, Schjodt, and Struwe (2019) demonstrated that nursing-based order sets in emergency settings led to improved antibiotic administration times in pediatric patients, reinforcing the effectiveness of standardized, nurse-led interventions across diverse patient populations.

In addition to protocol-driven approaches, workflow digitization has become an increasingly important strategy for enhancing efficiency in healthcare delivery. Ezeh *et al.* (2022) emphasize that digitizing healthcare workflows can streamline administrative processes, reduce redundancies, and improve coordination among care teams. By integrating electronic health records (EHRs) with clinical decision-support tools, healthcare providers can access real-time patient data, enabling faster identification of sepsis and more timely initiation of treatment. These digital systems also facilitate automated alerts and reminders, which can prompt clinicians to act promptly when sepsis criteria are met.

The integration of advanced analytics and data-driven systems further strengthens these efforts. Filani *et al.* (2022) and Tafirenyika *et al.* (2022) highlight the role of hospital analytics systems in enhancing operational efficiency and supporting evidence-based decision-making. By leveraging

large datasets, these systems can identify patterns in patient presentations, predict clinical deterioration, and optimize resource allocation. In the context of sepsis management, predictive analytics can assist clinicians in identifying high-risk patients earlier, thereby reducing delays in antibiotic administration.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative tool in improving the timeliness and precision of healthcare delivery. AI-driven health risk monitoring frameworks offer the capability to continuously analyze patient data and detect early signs of clinical deterioration. Ajao *et al.* (2024) describe how smart health monitoring systems can support real-time risk assessment and facilitate proactive intervention, enabling clinicians to initiate treatment before sepsis progresses to more severe stages. Such systems enhance situational awareness and support timely clinical decision-making in high-pressure environments.

Similarly, AI-powered digital health assistants are increasingly being utilized to support clinical workflows and improve patient management. Ezeh *et al.* (2024) and Kuponyi (2024) highlight that AI-driven assistants can automate routine tasks, provide clinical recommendations, and streamline communication among healthcare providers. By reducing cognitive workload and administrative burden, these tools allow clinicians to focus on critical tasks, such as initiating timely antibiotic therapy. The integration of such technologies into emergency care settings has the potential to significantly enhance efficiency and reduce delays.

Ensuring the availability and functionality of medical equipment is another critical factor in timely sepsis management. Kuponyi and Akomolafe (2024) emphasize the role of AI in predictive maintenance of medical equipment, which can prevent unexpected failures and ensure that essential devices are readily available when needed. In emergency departments, where rapid intervention is essential, the reliability of equipment such as infusion pumps and monitoring devices is crucial for timely antibiotic administration (Kuponyi & Akomolafe, 2024; Oparah *et al.*, 2024).

Expanding access to healthcare services through digital frameworks also contributes to improved timeliness of care. Ojeikere *et al.* (2024) highlight the importance of digital health access frameworks in enhancing the reach and efficiency of healthcare delivery, particularly in underserved populations. By facilitating early engagement with healthcare services and improving patient flow, these frameworks can reduce delays in diagnosis and treatment initiation, ultimately supporting more timely management of sepsis.

Interdisciplinary collaboration remains a cornerstone of effective sepsis care. The integration of digital tools and standardized protocols enhances communication among healthcare professionals, enabling coordinated and efficient responses to patient needs. By fostering collaboration between nurses, physicians, pharmacists, and support staff, healthcare systems can ensure that all aspects of sepsis management—from recognition to treatment—are executed promptly and effectively.

Despite these advancements, the successful implementation of these strategies requires ongoing commitment to education, training, and quality improvement. Healthcare providers must be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to utilize new technologies and adhere to evolving clinical guidelines. Continuous monitoring and evaluation of performance metrics, such as time to antibiotic

administration, are essential for identifying areas for improvement and sustaining progress.

## 6. Impact of Reduced Time to Antibiotics on Patient Outcomes

The timeliness of antibiotic administration in sepsis management is widely recognized as a critical determinant of patient outcomes, with substantial evidence linking early intervention to improved survival and reduced morbidity. As sepsis progresses rapidly, delays in initiating appropriate antimicrobial therapy can lead to irreversible organ dysfunction and increased mortality. Consequently, reducing the time to antibiotic administration has become a central focus of clinical practice and quality improvement initiatives in emergency care settings.

Robust observational and clinical studies have demonstrated a strong association between early antibiotic delivery and reduced mortality. Liu *et al.* (2017) reported that earlier administration of antibiotics in patients with sepsis was significantly associated with lower hospital mortality, even after adjusting for illness severity and other confounding factors. Their findings underscore the importance of timely intervention, suggesting that prompt treatment can interrupt the progression of sepsis and mitigate its systemic effects. This evidence reinforces the concept that time to antibiotics is not merely a process indicator but a clinically meaningful determinant of patient survival.

In addition to mortality reduction, timely antibiotic administration has been associated with improvements in broader clinical outcomes, including reduced length of hospital stay and decreased need for intensive care interventions. Martínez *et al.* (2020) emphasize that early initiation of appropriate antimicrobial therapy is essential for controlling infection and preventing progression to severe sepsis or septic shock. By limiting the extent of organ dysfunction, early treatment contributes to more favorable recovery trajectories and reduced healthcare resource utilization.

Quality improvement initiatives targeting early sepsis care have further demonstrated the positive impact of reducing time to antibiotics on patient outcomes. Gatewood *et al.* (2015) showed that implementing structured interventions in the emergency department significantly improved adherence to sepsis care protocols and reduced delays in treatment. These improvements were associated with enhanced clinical outcomes, highlighting the effectiveness of system-level changes in optimizing sepsis management. The replication of such findings across multiple settings underscores the generalizability of these interventions and their potential to drive meaningful improvements in patient care.

Nursing-led interventions have also been shown to play a crucial role in improving patient outcomes through timely antibiotic administration. Bruce *et al.* (2015) reported that the introduction of a nurse-initiated sepsis protocol not only reduced time to antibiotic delivery but also improved compliance with sepsis bundles and decreased in-hospital mortality. These findings highlight the pivotal role of emergency nurses in facilitating rapid treatment and underscore the importance of empowering nursing staff to initiate critical interventions.

Similarly, targeted efforts to reduce delays in specific patient populations have yielded positive outcomes. Emerson *et al.* (2019) demonstrated that focused interventions aimed at decreasing time to antibiotics in pediatric patients with sepsis

resulted in improved timeliness of care. While the study primarily addressed process improvements, the implications for patient outcomes are significant, as earlier treatment is closely linked to better clinical trajectories. Such findings emphasize the importance of tailoring interventions to the unique needs of different patient groups while maintaining a consistent focus on timeliness.

Despite the strong evidence supporting early antibiotic administration, some studies highlight the complexity of the relationship between timing and outcomes. Sherwin *et al.* (2017) note that while early and appropriate antibiotic therapy is associated with improved mortality in patients with severe sepsis and septic shock, the magnitude of benefit may vary depending on factors such as disease severity, appropriateness of antibiotic selection, and timing of diagnosis. This suggests that while reducing time to antibiotics is essential, it must be accompanied by accurate clinical assessment and appropriate therapeutic choices to achieve optimal outcomes.

Furthermore, the impact of timely antibiotic administration extends beyond individual patient outcomes to broader healthcare system performance. By reducing the severity of illness and preventing complications, early treatment can decrease the demand for intensive care resources and shorten hospital stays. Gatewood *et al.* (2015) highlight that improvements in early sepsis care not only enhance patient outcomes but also contribute to more efficient utilization of healthcare resources. This dual benefit underscores the value of investing in strategies that promote timely intervention.

It is also important to consider the balance between rapid antibiotic administration and antimicrobial stewardship. Martínez *et al.* (2020) emphasize that while early empiric therapy is critical, it should be followed by timely reassessment and de-escalation based on microbiological findings. This approach ensures that patients receive effective treatment while minimizing the risks associated with inappropriate antibiotic use, such as antimicrobial resistance and adverse drug effects.

The cumulative evidence clearly indicates that reducing time to antibiotic administration has a profound impact on patient outcomes in sepsis. Early intervention interrupts the progression of infection, reduces the risk of organ failure, and improves survival rates. However, achieving these benefits requires a coordinated approach that integrates timely recognition, appropriate antibiotic selection, and adherence to evidence-based protocols.

## 7. Future Directions and Research Implications

The evolving landscape of sepsis management, particularly in relation to reducing time to antibiotic administration, underscores the need for continued innovation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and robust research efforts. While substantial progress has been made in improving early recognition and timely treatment, persistent gaps in clinical practice and variability in outcomes highlight the necessity for forward-looking strategies. Future directions in this field are increasingly shaped by advances in digital health, artificial intelligence (AI), predictive analytics, and systems-level integration, all of which hold promise for transforming emergency nursing practice and enhancing patient outcomes. One of the most significant developments in recent years is the application of AI-driven predictive modelling in healthcare. Predictive analytics offers the potential to identify patients at risk of sepsis before clinical deterioration becomes

evident, thereby enabling earlier intervention. Tafirenyika (2023) emphasizes that AI-based predictive models can analyze large volumes of patient data in real time, detecting subtle physiological changes that may not be immediately apparent to clinicians. This capability is particularly relevant in emergency settings, where rapid decision-making is critical and early detection can significantly reduce time to antibiotic administration.

Building on this, Sagay *et al.* (2024) highlight the role of AI in optimizing treatment planning and predicting patient outcomes. By integrating clinical, laboratory, and historical patient data, AI systems can support more accurate and timely decision-making, guiding clinicians toward appropriate interventions. In the context of sepsis, such tools could assist emergency nurses in prioritizing high-risk patients, triggering early sepsis protocols, and facilitating rapid antibiotic delivery. This represents a paradigm shift from reactive to proactive care, where interventions are initiated based on predictive insights rather than overt clinical deterioration.

In parallel, advancements in machine learning, including quantum machine learning approaches, are expanding the possibilities for early disease detection and surveillance. Omolayo *et al.* (2024) describe how quantum machine learning can enhance epidemic surveillance by processing complex datasets at unprecedented speeds. While primarily applied at the population level, these technologies have implications for individual patient care, as they can inform early warning systems and improve the detection of infectious disease patterns. Integrating such systems into emergency care workflows could enhance situational awareness and support timely clinical interventions in sepsis management.

The integration of wearable technologies into healthcare systems further represents a promising avenue for early detection and continuous monitoring. Hanafi *et al.* (2025) discuss the growing role of AI-enabled wearable devices in public health surveillance, highlighting their ability to capture real-time physiological data such as heart rate, temperature, and oxygen saturation. In the context of sepsis, these devices could facilitate early identification of abnormal physiological trends, enabling prehospital recognition and earlier initiation of care pathways. This shift toward continuous, real-time monitoring has the potential to bridge gaps between community and hospital care, reducing delays in diagnosis and treatment.

Digital transformation in public health surveillance also plays a critical role in shaping future sepsis care. The integration of digital technologies into healthcare systems enhances data sharing, improves coordination, and supports timely decision-making. In emergency settings, such transformations can streamline workflows, reduce administrative burdens, and facilitate rapid communication among healthcare providers. These improvements are essential for ensuring that patients with sepsis receive prompt and coordinated care, particularly in high-demand environments.

In addition to technological advancements, the future of sepsis management will require continued emphasis on nursing practice and interdisciplinary collaboration. Almutairi *et al.* (2024) highlight the importance of nursing care in early recognition, intervention, and prevention of sepsis, emphasizing that nurses remain central to the delivery of timely and effective care. As healthcare systems become

increasingly complex, the role of nurses is likely to expand, encompassing not only clinical assessment and intervention but also the integration of digital tools and data-driven decision-making into routine practice.

Nurse-directed models of care are expected to play an increasingly prominent role in future sepsis management strategies. Ferguson *et al.* (2019) demonstrate the effectiveness of nurse-directed sepsis care in improving timeliness and outcomes, suggesting that empowering nurses to lead early interventions can significantly enhance care delivery. Future research should explore the scalability and adaptability of such models across diverse healthcare settings, including resource-limited environments where delays in treatment are often more pronounced.

Systems-based approaches to sepsis management also warrant further investigation. Khanina *et al.* (2020) highlight the potential of leveraging existing medical emergency response systems to improve sepsis care for hospital inpatients. Extending these systems to emergency departments and integrating them with advanced technologies could further enhance early recognition and timely intervention. Research in this area should focus on optimizing system design, improving communication pathways, and evaluating the impact of integrated care models on patient outcomes.

Despite these advancements, several challenges remain that must be addressed through future research. One key issue is the need for standardized definitions and metrics for measuring time to antibiotic administration. Seymour *et al.* (2017) highlight the importance of consistent measurement in evaluating the effectiveness of sepsis interventions. Variability in defining “time zero” and differences in clinical practice can complicate comparisons across studies and hinder the development of evidence-based guidelines. Establishing standardized frameworks for measurement will be essential for advancing research and improving clinical practice.

Another critical area for future investigation is the balance between timely antibiotic administration and antimicrobial stewardship. While early treatment is essential, inappropriate or unnecessary antibiotic use can contribute to antimicrobial resistance and adverse patient outcomes. Research should focus on developing strategies that optimize both timeliness and appropriateness of therapy, potentially through the use of AI-driven decision-support systems that guide antibiotic selection and de-escalation.

Furthermore, there is a need to explore the implementation of innovative technologies in diverse healthcare settings. While high-resource environments may readily adopt AI and digital health solutions, resource-limited settings may face significant barriers, including limited infrastructure and workforce capacity. Future research should address these disparities by developing scalable, cost-effective solutions that can be adapted to different contexts.

Interdisciplinary collaboration will remain a cornerstone of future sepsis management efforts. The integration of expertise from nursing, medicine, informatics, and engineering is essential for developing and implementing innovative solutions. Tafirenyika *et al.* (2023) and KuponyiAkamolafe and Omotayo (2023) emphasize the importance of collaborative approaches in advancing healthcare innovation, highlighting that complex challenges such as sepsis require coordinated, multidisciplinary responses.

## 8. Conclusion

The findings of this review underscore the critical importance of timely antibiotic administration in the management of sepsis within emergency care settings, while demonstrating the central role of emergency nursing interventions in achieving this objective. The study set out to examine how nursing-led strategies, clinical protocols, and system-level innovations contribute to reducing delays in antibiotic delivery, and the evidence synthesized throughout confirms that these aims have been comprehensively addressed. By integrating insights from clinical studies, quality improvement initiatives, and emerging technological advancements, this review has provided a holistic understanding of both the challenges and opportunities inherent in optimizing sepsis care.

Key findings reveal that early recognition, supported by structured triage systems and nurse-driven screening tools, significantly enhances the speed of clinical response. The implementation of nurse-initiated protocols and standing orders further reduces reliance on hierarchical decision-making, enabling more rapid initiation of treatment. Additionally, workflow optimization and interdisciplinary collaboration have been identified as essential components in minimizing delays, particularly when supported by digital health systems and data-driven decision-making frameworks. The integration of artificial intelligence and predictive analytics emerges as a promising frontier, offering the potential to transform sepsis management through earlier detection and more precise clinical interventions.

Despite these advancements, persistent barriers—including diagnostic uncertainty, organizational inefficiencies, and variability in clinical practice—continue to hinder optimal performance. Addressing these challenges requires sustained investment in education, protocol standardization, and system redesign.

In conclusion, improving time to antibiotic administration in sepsis necessitates a multifaceted approach that combines clinical expertise, nursing leadership, and technological innovation. It is recommended that healthcare institutions prioritize the implementation of nurse-led protocols, invest in digital health infrastructure, and promote interdisciplinary collaboration to enhance care delivery. Future research should focus on refining predictive tools, standardizing clinical metrics, and ensuring equitable access to innovative solutions across diverse healthcare settings.

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