

Right Patient, Right Place, Right Now: Why Initial Acuity Assessment Matters More Than Ever



When it comes to emergency care, few decisions carry more weight—or risk—than initial acuity assessment.

Often known as triage, this process goes far beyond ticking a box or assigning a colour code. It's complex clinical decision-making that happens fast, with limited information and high stakes. In those first moments, emergency nurses are asked to determine who needs immediate, life-saving intervention, who can wait safely, and who requires just a few tests or observations to clarify their pathway.

"It's a balancing act with clinical risk on every side".

Get it wrong, and patients can deteriorate in waiting rooms. Over-call the urgency, and you slow the entire department down—stretching resources, extending waits, and inadvertently increasing overall risk. It's a pressure-cooker role that demands sharp critical thinking, excellent judgement, and the kind of pattern recognition that only comes with experience and robust education.

And that's why, traditionally, emergency nurses don't take on this role lightly. It typically takes two to three years of ED experience, supported by structured education, before a nurse is ready to undertake it safely and competently.

Fortunately, this isn't just recognised by experienced clinicians. It's now embedded into national thinking. NHS England's Acuity Steering Group fully acknowledges the complexity and risk of initial assessment and is working to standardise how it's delivered across the country.

The Faculty of Emergency Nursing (FEN) has been proud to contribute to that work.

At FEN, we know what this role demands—and what kind of support nurses need to succeed in it. That's why we've developed a comprehensive, practical, and clinically grounded Initial Acuity Assessment learning offer.

Here's what's included:

- ✓ Four bespoke Initial Acuity Assessment webinars, specifically developed to support the new national acuity model—far surpassing the traditional one-day triage course. These are available on-demand as part of a FEN subscription, which also provides access to over 200 additional emergency nursing webinars across our full programmes.
- ✓ Two expert webinars from NHS England project leads Dr Tom Hughes and Sade Matakitoa, explaining the model's rationale, progress, and impact.
- ✓ Four quality-assured assessment proformas, including two Mini-CEX and two ESLEs for both primary and secondary initial assessment roles—tools that make capability visible and measurable.
- ✓ Supporting webinars for assessors using these proformas—free to access.

Whether you're a nurse stepping up to the role, an educator building confidence in your team, or a manager wanting to reduce clinical risk without adding burden—FEN offers a ready-made solution you can trust.

Because the patients waiting at the front door deserve the right decision—first time, every time.

And so do the nurses making those decisions.

Access the tools that support safer, faster decision-making.

- ✓ **Access the tools that support safer, faster decision-making.**
- The Initial Assessment proformas and assessor support webinars are **freely available to all**, helping you apply structured and measurable assessments with confidence.
- The full Initial Acuity Assessment webinar series, aligned with the new national model, is **available as part of a FEN Subscriber package**.