

Study on non-urgent emergency department visits in South Tyrol (Italy)

Submission date 10/09/2024	Recruitment status No longer recruiting	<input type="checkbox"/> Prospectively registered <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Protocol
Registration date 25/09/2024	Overall study status Completed	<input type="checkbox"/> Statistical analysis plan <input type="checkbox"/> Results
Last Edited 06/10/2025	Condition category Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual participant data <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

Emergency departments (EDs) often become crowded due to patients seeking care for non-urgent issues. This may point to problems in accessing primary care services. Factors like convenience, age, and dissatisfaction with non-hospital care contribute to this. This study aims to understand how many of these non-urgent visits could have been avoided and to explore what social, demographic, and clinical factors influence patients to visit the ED unnecessarily.

Who can participate?

Adults aged 18 years or older who visit one of seven participating EDs in South Tyrol (Northern Italy) with non-urgent conditions ('blue' or 'green' triage levels according to Manchester Triage System) can participate if they consent.

What does the study involve?

Participants will answer a questionnaire about their reasons for visiting the ED and their previous use of community care services, including their General Practitioner. The triage nurses and medical doctors will also collect information about patients' condition and treatment. This data will be analyzed to identify factors associated with avoidable ED visits.

What are the possible benefits and risks for participants?

There are no direct benefits or significant risks to participants. However, the study could help improve healthcare services by reducing unnecessary ED visits in the future.

Where is the study run from?

The study will take place in seven public hospitals in the South Tyrolean Health Service, located in the Province of Bolzano-Bozen, northern Italy.

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?

January 2024 to December 2025

Who is funding the study?

The study is funded from the Institute of General Practice and Public Health, Claudiana College of Health Professions, Lorenz Böhler Street 13, Bolzano - Bozen (BZ), 39100, Italy

Who is the main contact?

Dr Dietmar Ausserhofer, dietmar.ausserhofer@claudiana.bz.it

Contact information

Type(s)

Public, Scientific, Principal investigator

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Additional identifiers

Study information

Scientific Title

The Care Accessibility and Reasons for Non-urgent Emergency Department Visits in South Tyrol (Italy): The multicenter cross-sectional CARES study

Acronym

CARES

Study objectives

This study aims (1) to describe the proportion of potentially avoidable, non-urgent ED visits; (2) to describe patients' motives (e.g., individual, system and cultural factors) for attending the ED for non-urgent visits; (3) to compare patients' socio-demographic and clinical characteristics between potentially avoidable and non-avoidable ED visits as judged by the healthcare personnel; and (4) to explore the associations between individual, system and cultural factors and avoidability of non-urgent visits to the ED.

Ethics approval required

Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)

approved 28/06/2024, Medical Ethics Committee of the South Tyrolean Health Service (NOI Techpark, A6, A.-Volta-Straße 21, Bozen-Bolzano, 39100, Italy; +39 471 436191; IRTS@sabes.it), ref: Nr. 41-2024

Study design

Observational cross-sectional study

Primary study design

Observational

Study type(s)

Other

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

Adult patients accessing emergency department for non-urgent visits.

Interventions

The enrolled participants will be asked to complete a paper questionnaire designed to collect information on their symptoms, self-perceived urgency, and motives for attending the ED. At the same time, the triage nurse will start completing a paper questionnaire to provide information about the triage (e.g., MTS priority level and specific flow chart). At discharge, the medical doctor will fill out the diagnoses, and both the triage nurse and medical doctor will assess the avoidability of the ED visit.

Intervention Type

Other

Primary outcome(s)

Potentially avoidable ED visits. There is no universally accepted definition of a potentially preventable ED visit. In our study we define potentially avoidable ED visits those that are (1) triaged as non-urgent (i.e., priority level "blue" or "green" according to the MTS), and (2) where the care provided could have been treated safely and effectively in a primary care setting (e.g., GP). Accordingly, the healthcare professionals in the ED (i.e., the triage nurse and the medical doctor in charge of the patient) will independently assess the patient at discharge if the visit was potentially avoidable (1=yes, 2=no) considering the patient's somatic, mental, or social problems in accessing the ED. Measured using patient records at the end of the study.

Key secondary outcome(s)

Patients' self-reported access to primary care services (i.e., contact with or visit to the GP) for the current health problem prior to attending the ED (1=yes, 2=no). Measured using patient records at the end of the study.

Completion date

31/12/2025

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

1. Adult patients (≥ 18 years).
2. Clinical conditions triaged as "non-urgent" ("blue") or "normal" ("green") according to the Manchester Triage System.
3. Able to communicate in either German or Italian.
4. Consent to participate in the study.

Participant type(s)

Patient

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Adult

Lower age limit

18 years

Upper age limit

100 years

Sex

All

Total final enrolment

660

Key exclusion criteria

1. Minor patients (<18 years old).
2. Patients with high acuity triaged as "immediate" ("red"), "very urgent" ("orange"), or "urgent" ("yellow").
3. Non-triaged patients requiring immediate or emergency treatment without waiting time.
4. Patients triaged with fast track (i.e., specialized visits).
5. Additionally, patients meeting one or more of the following criteria will also be excluded:
 - 5.1. Cognitive impairment (e.g., patients with any condition that results in impaired decision-making that may affect informed consent, such as patients with dementia or psychiatric conditions).
 - 5.2. Inability to communicate verbally in German or Italian.
 - 5.3. Lack of consent (e.g., patients who refused to participate or were unable to consent).
 - 5.4. Direct referral to another outpatient clinic or department within the hospital.

Date of first enrolment

09/09/2024

Date of final enrolment

31/12/2024

Locations**Countries of recruitment**

Italy

Study participating centre

South Tyrolean Healthcare Trust - Hospital of Bolzano-Bozen

Lorenz-Böhler-Str. 5

Bozen-Bolzano
Italy
39100

Study participating centre
South Tyrolean Healthcare Trust - Hospital of Merano-Meran
G.-Rossini-Straße 5
Meran
Italy
39012

Study participating centre
South Tyrolean Healthcare Trust - Hospital of Bressanone-Brixen
Dantestraße 51
Bressanone-Brixen
Italy
39042

Study participating centre
South Tyrolean Healthcare Trust - Hospital of Brunico-Bruneck
Spitalstraße 11
Brunico-Bruneck
Italy
39031

Study participating centre
South Tyrolean Healthcare Trust - Hospital of Silandro-Schlanders
Krankenhaus-Straße 3
Silandro-Schlanders
Italy
39028

Study participating centre
South Tyrolean Healthcare Trust - Hospital of Vipiteno-Sterzing
Margarethen-Straße 24
Vipiteno-Sterzing
Italy
39049

Study participating centre

South Tyrolean Healthcare Trust - Hospital of San Candido-Innichen

Freising-Straße 2

San Candido-Innichen

Italy

Freising-Straße 2

Sponsor information

Organisation

Institute of General Practice and Public Health (University Center for Healthcare Professions)

Funder(s)

Funder type

University/education

Funder Name

Institute of General Practice and Public Health (University Center for Healthcare Professions)

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

The data presented in this study will be available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to language and ethnicity reasons in the politically autonomous state of the Italian region, Trentino – Alto Adige.

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IPD sharing plan summary

Available on request

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Protocol article		02/10/2025	06/10/2025	Yes	No