

Lay Summary

How can we ensure the streaming of patients to primary care in emergency departments works well and is safe?

GP services have been introduced into many emergency departments to manage increasing demand for urgent care. This research looks at the things that make a difference when deciding which service a patient needs, how quickly patients are seen and discharged, whether they receive the treatment they need, and whether this arrangement is safe for the patient.

Our findings are based on visits to 10 emergency departments and interviews with the emergency care and primary care staff working there.

We found that ensuring patients were directed to the right service and were treated quickly and safely was affected by:

- Experience, skills and confidence of staff in streaming role
- Training, guidance, and support given to staff
- Reviewing, responding to problems, and seeking to improve streaming process
- Good team-working and communication between emergency and primary care staff
- Good management of the department

Our recommendations:

- Involve medical staff in designing services that suit local circumstances and take into account skills of staff. There is no one-size fits all
- Train nurses to understand the work primary care staff do
- Use senior/more experience nurses to take on initial streaming role or review streaming decisions to improve patient flow
- Monitor how busy different services are and make adjustments to help waiting times and flow.
- Improve team-working by involving primary care and ED teams in developing streaming guidance and training providing opportunities for ED staff to get to know primary care staff and how they work