

Co-located GP clinics can ease the load in ERs

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(Medical Xpress)—The addition of a GP clinic at hospitals should reduce waiting times in emergency departments, according to new research.

Researchers from Monash University's Centre for [Health Economics](#) investigated waiting times in hospital emergency departments, comparing those where there are a number of emergency departments in a region with those where hospitals provide co-located general practice (GP) clinics.

Co-located GP clinics are special-purpose services located within a public hospital, near or adjacent to its [emergency department](#). They provide acute, episodic primary care services such as medical consultation, fracture management, management of minor injury and trauma and minor procedures on a walk-in basis.

Lead researcher Dr Anurag Sharma from the Centre for Health Economics said the study found diverting non-urgent patients to co-located GP clinics was a more effective way to reduce emergency department overcrowding.

"It was believed that by providing more emergency departments in a region there would be more choice for patients, thereby reducing [overcrowding](#) and [waiting times](#) in emergency departments," Dr Sharma said.

"However, our study found that more choice of emergency departments actually increased the waiting time for emergency category 2 patients, who are suffering from a [critical illness](#) or very [severe pain](#) and need urgent attention, as it generated more demand by non-urgent patients."

The study found that co-located GP clinics reduced the waiting time for patients in the emergency department by 19 per cent.

Dr Sharma said diverting non-urgent patients to alternative care meant there were more resources for treating category 2 patients.

"The degree to which alternative models of care reduced emergency department waiting time was previously unknown and this study helps fill this gap," Dr Sharma said.

"Co-located GP clinics provide timely, safe and accessible services for patients seeking primary medical care outside business hours and are a

good alternative for patients who don't need urgent attention," Dr Sharma said.

The Department of Human Services has estimated that GPs could treat about 37 per cent of all those attending metropolitan emergency departments in Victoria.

Provided by Monash University

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