

Optimizing emergency department operations

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▶ Timely assessment and rapid decision-making in emergency departments (EDs) accelerates patients' access to potentially life-saving care.

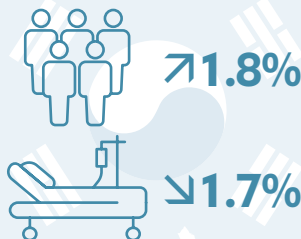


▶ However, ED crowding is a global problem and long ED waits are becoming more common

- ED visits rose by **over 60% in the US** between 1997 and 2019¹

+60%

- In **South Korea** between 2017 and 2018 ED patient numbers **increased by 1.8%** but ED bed numbers **decreased by 1.7%**²



- In **England the monthly waiting time target has not been met since 2015** (for 95% of patients to leave the ED)³



▶ Pandemic-driven waits for elective care are worsening the situation⁴

Many of the root causes of ED crowding need wider organisational or health system measures to resolve them.⁵ Innovative technologies and approaches are being used to help smooth ED workflow at key stages:



INPUT

ADDRESSING LARGE PATIENT VOLUMES PRESENTING AT THE ED

- Telephone-based triage or online artificial intelligence (AI) enabled self-assessment tools can direct patients to appropriate services, pre-empting unnecessary ED visits.⁶⁻⁹
- Improving patients' access to primary care through extended hours and telemedicine can also reduce ED demand.¹⁰⁻¹³
- Providing primary care services alongside the ED for low-risk patients allows ED physicians to focus on patients with the greatest needs.¹⁴⁻¹⁷



THROUGHPUT

MANAGING DELAYS IN TRIAGE, ASSESSMENT, DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

- Point-of-care testing can deliver test results rapidly around the clock, enhancing pre-ED triage and timely clinical decision-making in the ED.^{18,19}
- Nurses and allied health professionals trained to advanced practice levels increase efficiency by carrying out some tasks previously carried out by physicians, such as initial triage and test ordering.²⁰⁻²²
- Using telemedicine consultations within the ED can help to support staff in busy EDs and provide access to specialists, particularly in remote areas.²³⁻²⁷

OUTPUT

IMPROVING PATIENT FLOW OUT OF THE ED

- Technology-enabled "virtual wards" relieve pressure on inpatient beds by allowing healthcare professionals to remotely monitor patients in their homes.²⁸⁻³⁰
- Interactive digital tools are being developed to help assess whether inpatients nearing discharge understand their medication and self-care instructions before they leave, reducing the risk of them needing to return to the ED.³¹



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For full details see the full report “Time to care: innovating to improve timely decision-making in emergency departments” at <https://impact.economist.com/perspectives/healthcare/optimising-care-in-health-systems>