

ABSTRACT

Patients who use the emergency department frequently (≥ 5 or more visits per year) make up a small percentage of the patient population but represent a large proportion of all emergency department visits and have conditions that are costly to treat. Previous research has found that there are many reasons for high use of the emergency department and these can be classified as being due to individual-level, health system-level, and community-level factors. Although various health care programs have been implemented to reduce the number of non-emergency hospital visits, their results are not consistent and there are gaps in what is known. This project aims to provide recommendations that are patient-centred on ways to better serve these individuals in the community in order to reduce non-emergency visits to the hospital. This will be done through a study of adults, 18 years of age and older, who have frequent use of the emergency department in the city of Krakow, Poland. The project has four objectives: 1) to prepare a patient profile for individuals experiencing high use of the emergency department; 2) to examine changes in health care utilization patterns among this population during the COVID-19 pandemic; 3) to carry out focus groups with relevant community and professional groups to gather information on the reasons for high emergency department use; and 4) to establish evidence-based strategic recommendations for health care options that are patient-centred for individuals experiencing high emergency department use. This information is necessary to advance health care in an equitable way among this population in Europe, while at the same time reducing the pressures on overburdened systems and ensuring the proper use of services given limited health resources. This is especially critical during times of stress on the health system. The study results will be applicable to urban health systems in Europe. They will be disseminated to relevant groups, including patients, health care workers, academics, and policy makers.