

LETTERS

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Emergency Care In Australia

Daniel Pallin and coauthors point out that population aging in the United States “will not cause the number of ED [emergency department] visits to increase any more than would be expected from population growth” (Jul 2013). In contrast, research in Australia has shown a persistent rise in demand for emergency ambulance and ED services over a prolonged period.^{1,2}

Australians have had a 55 percent increase in ED visits over a decade, which has exceeded the 19 percent growth in population for that time period and which represents a 32 percent increase in ED visits after population changes have been adjusted for. Of note, people age eighty-five or older continue to be increasingly disproportionately represented in those visiting the ED.³

When my colleagues and I applied the observed longitudinal trends to population estimates for 2015, the

projected numbers and rates of ED use by the older age group continued to accelerate in the future, with the rate rising from an observed 474 ED visits for every 1,000 people in 2007–09 to more than 800 visits per 1,000 people in 2014–15. A solution for reducing avoidable visits to the ED in an attempt to free acute care hospitals of any unessential burden will require a focus on timely community-based care.

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NOTES

- 1 Lowthian JA, Jolley DJ, Curtis AJ, Currell A, Cameron PA, Stoelwinder JU, et al. The challenges of population ageing: accelerating demand for emergency ambulance services by older patients, 1995–2015. *Med J Aust.* 2011;194(11):574–8.
- 2 Lowthian JA, Curtis AJ, Jolley DJ, Stoelwinder JU, McNeil JJ, Cameron PA. Demand at the emergency department front door: 10-year trends in presentations. *Med J Aust.* 2012;196:128–32.
- 3 Lowthian J, Curtis A, Stoelwinder J, McNeil J, Cameron P. Emergency demand and repeat attendances by older patients. *Intern Med J.* 2013; 43(5):554–60.