Emergency Medicine Services: Interprofessional Care Trends
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ABSTRACT
To understand trends in emergency medicine visits, we analyzed a 10-year period (1995-2004) by provider, patient characteristics, and diagnoses. Because of reported medical labor shortages, we focused on how doctors, physician assistants (PAs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) shared emergency medicine visits.

Data taken from the National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey allowed us to analyze over 1 billion (1,034,758,313) weighted emergency room visits from 1995 to 2004. The majority of patients were female (53.2%); the mean age of all patients was 35.3 years old. By 2004, physicians were the provider of record for emergency visits at 92.6%, with PAs at 5.7% and NPs at 1.7%. Emergency visits increased for all three providers over the ten years. However, patients seen by PAs increased significantly when compared with those seen by physicians or NPs. Medications were prescribed for three-quarters of the visits and were consistent in the mean number of prescriptions written among the three prescribers. Controlled substances accounted for 29.8% of prescriptions written by physicians, 29.3% by PAs, and 26.9% by NPs. No significant differences emerged when urban and rural settings were compared.

Factors that may explain the expansion of the roles and utilization of PAs and NPs may include increasing acceptance, clarification of legal and regulatory aspects of practice, staffing adjustments for overcrowded patient care circumstances, shortages of fully-trained doctors, and the limitation of working hours of physician postgraduate trainees. Emergency department visits are forecasted to outpace the population demand with PAs/NPs used in greater numbers. In view of an increasing demand for emergency medical services and a continuing shortage of physician personnel, policies are needed for workforce planning to meet the demand.

INTRODUCTION
• The gap between medical workforce supply and demand is growing
• 4,800 US emergency equipped medical centers
• Emergency departments are increasingly using physician assistants (PAs) and nurse practitioners (NPs)
• The trend in emergency demand and how various teams of providers are used is unknown

METHODS
• National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey on Emergency Medical Services 1995-2004 (10 years)
• Total visits, characteristics of patients and providers, weighted visits, diagnoses, and resources used for visits.

RESULT
Total: 1.035 billion visits spread over 10 years

CONCLUSION
• The use of PAs in emergency medicine is outpacing that of doctors and NPs
• Emergency department visits are expected to outpace the growth of the supply of emergency medicine providers
• Staffing emergency medicine is less complex than staffing other levels of medical care
• The best use of human capital for the management of emergency medical demand has not been examined.