

How Does Access To Primary Health Care Services Influence Utilization Of Emergency Departments? Preliminary Findings From The Preparing Emergency Patients And Providers (PrEPP) Study

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BACKGROUND

Primary care and emergency care services are vital components of the Canadian health care system.¹

Many Canadians visit the emergency department (ED) with non-urgent medical issues that may be more appropriately managed in a primary care setting.^{2,3}

Others are referred to the ED due to the urgency of their health concern.¹⁻³

There is limited research examining how access to primary care services influences a patient's decision to visit an ED.

METHODS

As part of a larger study on ED patient expectations, a 7-item, paper-based questionnaire is being distributed to all patients with a CTAS score of 2 to 5 who presented to four EDs in Nova Scotia between January 2016-May 2016 (n=490):

- QEII Health Sciences Centre
- IWK Health Centre
- Cobequid Community Health Centre
- Dartmouth General

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the first question of the PrEPP questionnaire:

“Who/what helped you make the decision to come in today?”



OBJECTIVE

To describe how access to primary care services impacts patients' decisions to visit emergency departments.

PrEPP STUDY

A three-phased mixed methods design is being used to:

1. Explore the feasibility of implementing a patient expectation questionnaire in the ED.
2. Measure the effect of the questionnaire on productivity, resource utilization, and patient/provider satisfaction.

PHASE ONE: IMPLEMENTATION PHASE (Jan- Aug 2016)

Distribute PrEPP questionnaire
Collect administrative ED data
Collect patient and provider satisfaction data

PHASE TWO: REFLECTION PHASE (Sept – Oct 2016)

Stop PrEPP questionnaire distribution
Conduct focus groups with ED staff
Refine implementation strategy and PrEPP questionnaire

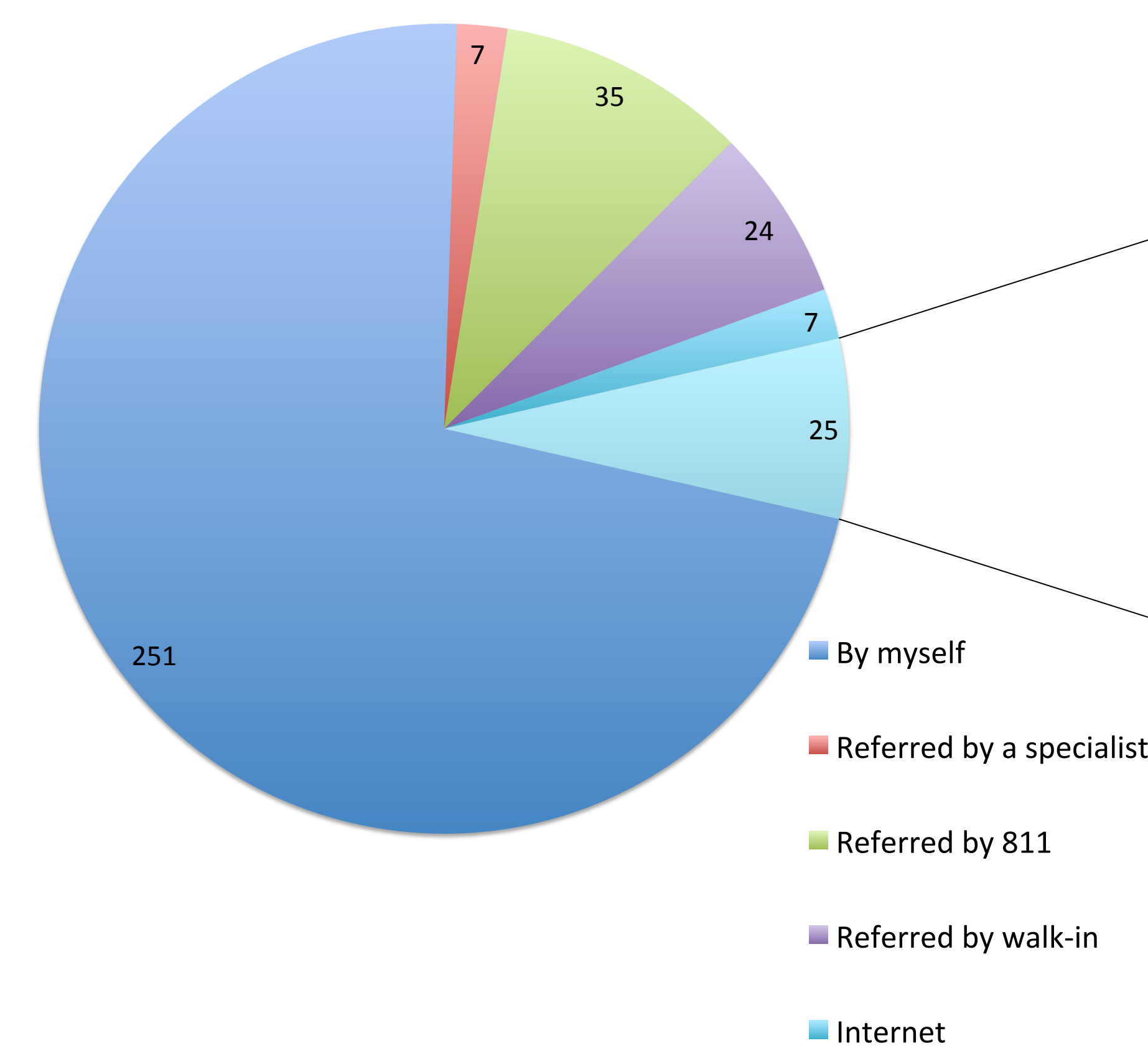
PHASE THREE: REIMPLEMENTATION PHASE (Nov 2016- June 2017)

Reintroduce PrEPP questionnaire
Examine administrative data and process evaluations

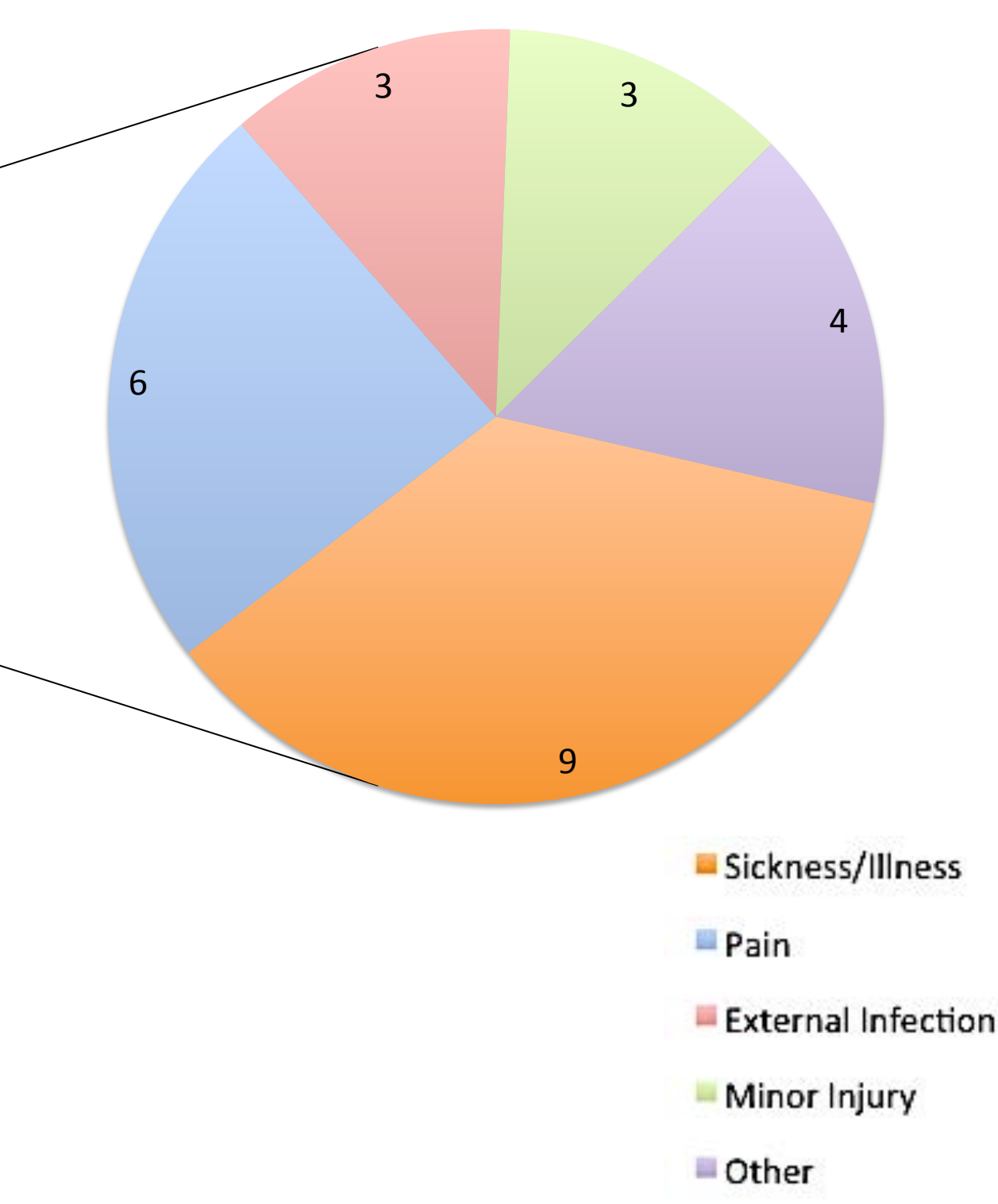
Ongoing ED Observations

RESULTS

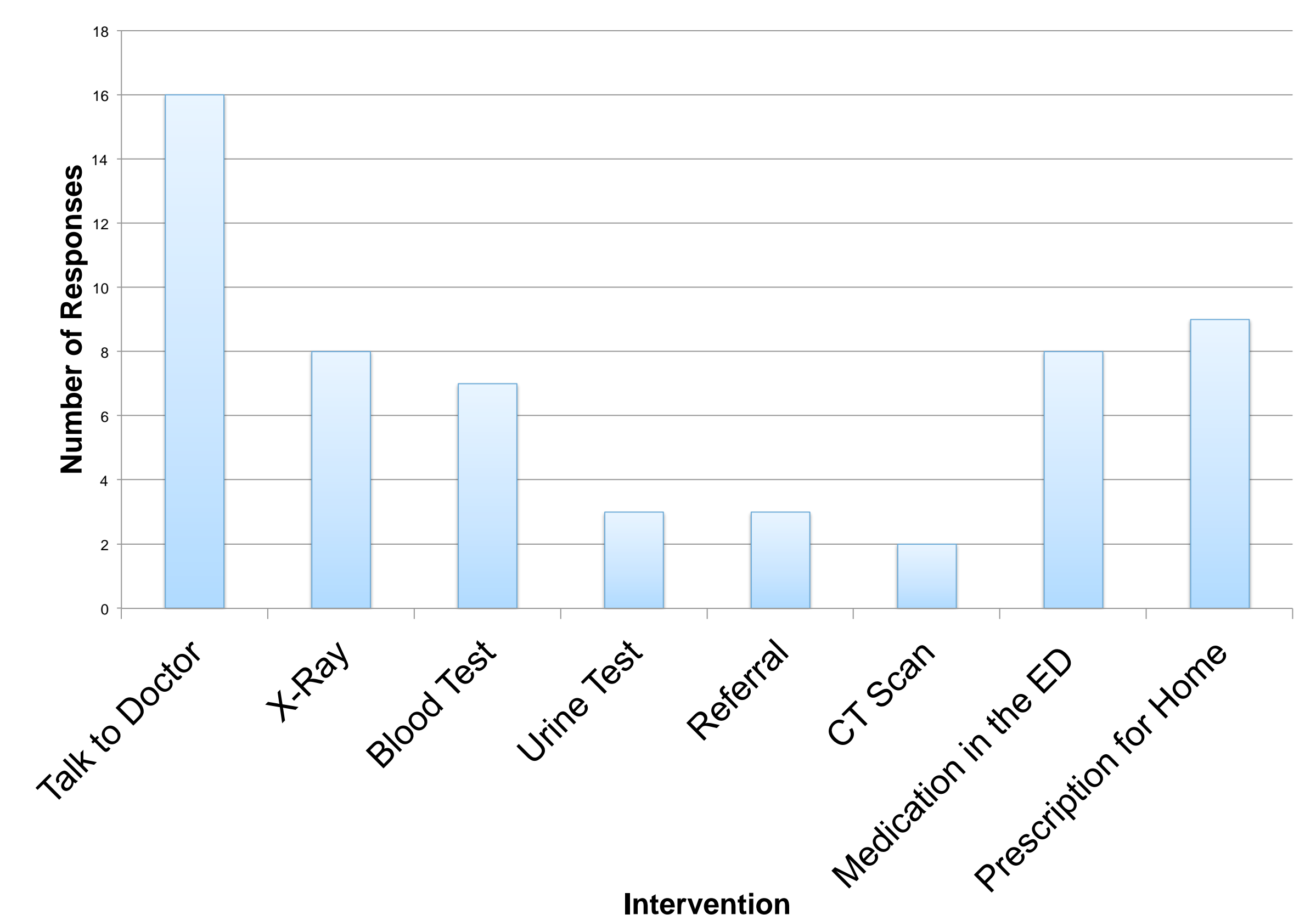
Responses for Patient Decision to visit an ED



Reasons for Visit Among Participants who were Unable to See Family Physician



Participant Expectations for ED Interventions When Unable to See Family Physician



CONCLUSIONS

Preliminary analyses show that primary health care services and providers can influence patient decisions to attend the ED.

This research highlights some of the linkages between PC services and EDs:

- Patients are being referred to EDs by primary care services.
- Some patients are accessing EDs due to an inability to access timely care.
- ED patients that are unable to see family physician are seeking medical interventions that could also be provided by primary care services.
- Many patients decide to visit the ED by themselves. Further investigation is needed to determine if their needs could be more appropriately met prior to visiting the ED.

This descriptive research is an important first step in identifying opportunities to optimize emergency care and primary care services in Nova Scotia.

References

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2. Canadian Institute of Health Information. (2014). Sources of Potentially Avoidable Emergency Department Visits. Retrieved from https://secure.cihi.ca/free_products/ED_Report_ForWeb_EN_Final.pdf
3. Uscher-Pines, L., Pines, J., Kellermann, A., Gillen, E., & Mehrotra, A. (2013). Deciding to Visit the Emergency Department for Non-Urgent Conditions: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *The American Journal of Managed Care*, 19(1), 47–59.