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What is a pre-alert? Exploring ambulance and Emergency Department staff perspectives of the pre-alerts process.

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Mixed methods: qualitative component

- 3 ambulance services, 6 Emergency Departments
- Semi-structured interviews :
 35 ambulance clinicians, 40 ED clinicians
- 156 hours non-participant observation in EDs (143 p-a calls)
- Detailed observation notes, verbatim transcripts
- NVivo™ Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke)





What is the problem?

- Pre-alert calls key to managing time-critical patients in Emergency Department
- Judicious use is key in context of high demand for emergency care and crowded emergency departments.
- Is there a shared understanding of their purpose?

Different perceptions of what a pre-alert is:

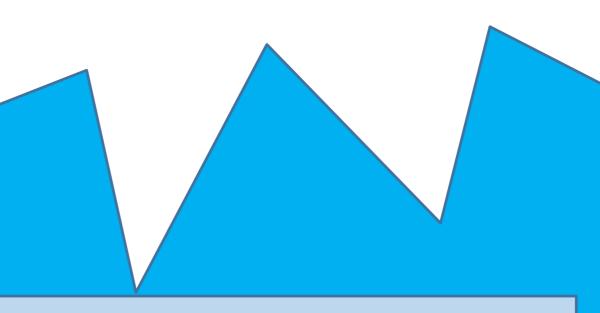
- Information provision expectations of a specific response upon arrival (resus, other)
- Information giving **no specific response** expected but handover of information for ED to decide
- Protocol driven 'courtesy call' no expectation of a specific response
- 'Heads up' to inform the ED about a patient who may not require a different response immediately – concern about deterioration
- Advice about how to manage the patient, or where to take them.

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"This is a pre-alert not an 'asking permission' " [Amb 37]

Frustrations arose when ED and ambulance staff had different expectations and perceptions of a prealert.

This influenced future pre-alerting behaviour.



"I think the pre-alert system is great but I think it's also the only system you've got to contact someone to just go "I'm not sure about this patient" [Amb 33]

Different perceptions of a successful prealert:

Ambulance clinicians:

- Successful pre-alert = 'accepted' into resus
- Frustrated by perceived inaction

ED staff:

- Valued pre-alerts create space etc.
- Unable to act due to lack of resources
- Valued psychological preparedness







Implications

- Need to reframe perceptions of pre-alerts no such thing as a 'failed' pre-alert
- Training into how to undertake and receive pre-alert calls should include consideration of and understanding of joint perspectives



