

# MAPHM Symposium 2017

20<sup>th</sup> October 2017

Abstract Title:

## **Self-Referrals and Crowding at the Accident and Emergency Department: Time for Intervention**

First author:

**Dr Kurt Apap**

Other Authors:

Gerd Xuereb

### Abstract

The issue of self-referrals to the Accident & Emergency department (A&E) is contentious and continues to provoke discussion in the light of increasing healthcare expenses and crowding. 70% (77,571) of patients presenting to the A&E department at Mater Dei Hospital in 2012 were registered as self referrals well beyond the norm which stands around 30% in Western Europe.

Crowding is one of the leading problems facing emergency departments. There is a large body of evidence that patients are harmed in crowded emergency departments. Crowded departments threaten delivery of timely care; treatment and/or interventions. Compliance with other recognised care standards is also at risk.

An analysis of the self-referred cases to the local A&E identified 20,207 high priority cases compared to 14,005 medium priority and 13,460 low priority cases in 2012. Paediatric, ENT and Ophthalmic emergencies saw a higher number of self-referrals than other specialities. The reasons for self-referral range from health concerns; perceived facilities and investigations better at A&E; convenience; lack of confidence in GP/primary care and advice from others.

Reducing self-referrals has a win-win effect; it not only serves to provide better care to these same patients but also serves to better focus the resources on 'truly urgent' cases. Addressing self-referrals at the local A&E should take a multi-focus approach including improved primary care service and increased promotion of the services provided; patient education campaigns about cases meriting care at the A&E emergency department and staff education campaigns. The introduction of hospital policies dealing with self-referred cases should also be studied.

Addressing the self-referral problem to the A&E Department requires a holistic and multidisciplinary approach. Setting the foundation in the introduction national health policy concerning self-referrals



# MAPHM

MALTA ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC HEALTH MEDICINE

and their management across the various levels of the local healthcare system can be a good starting step for the much needed intervention.