

Quality Standards for Emergency Departments

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It is widely acknowledged that emergency departments (EDs) in Australia and around the world face increasing pressure due to growing demand. With growing demand comes other challenges such as improving the patient experience as well as the continuing need to provide high quality and safe care to patients.

The ED is a complex environment which requires the combined effort of clinical and administrative staff to ensure that all patients receive timely and effective care. With this in mind, a collaborative project between ACEM, CENA and consumers has been undertaken to develop the Quality Standards for Emergency Departments. These ED Quality Standards aim to provide the guidance needed to improve the quality of care offered to patients, their families and carers who present to the ED.

The implementation of quantitative targets in EDs has historically been associated with considerable disadvantages such as difficulty in collection, or more seriously, care being re-focused to a time target rather than the patient's care pathway [1, 2]. Consequently, a qualitative focus has been used in these quality standards because it was considered that this would enhance compliance for clinicians due to the promotion of the quality improvement process, rather than being used to measure performance [2].

These Quality Standards for EDs will offer department's guidance through standards and defined criteria to aspire to without fear of penalties. In this way, it is anticipated that the standards will allow EDs to better engage in quality improvement activities, and affect a change from within.

1. Lowthian, J. and P. Cameron, *Improving timeliness while improving the quality of emergency department care*. *Emergency Medicine Australasia*, 2012. **24**(3): p. 219-221.
2. Heyworth, J., *Emergency medicine-quality indicators: the United Kingdom perspective*. *Academic Emergency Medicine*, 2011. **18**(12): p. 1239-1241.