A&E attendance research published

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The results show that there is no obvious single cause for the increase in numbers of patients attending A&E at Addenbrooke’s Hospital between January and May 2014.

The research comprised a telephone survey with recent patients at Addenbrooke’s Emergency Department (ED). The results are based on 1,008 interviews with those aged 16+ and parents of those aged 0-11. Of these, 490 interviews were completed with patients who had visited ED in January and 518 were completed with those who visited in May.

While there is no clear over-arching reason for the increase in A&E visits, there are also a number of factors which – while individually are unlikely to explain the increase in attendances – when taken together may contribute to explaining the increase.

For example, Addenbrooke’s attracts a higher number of patients than would be expected on purely geographical terms. Its reputation means that some people describe it as their closest hospital and A&E department, even when it is not. This has been true for some time, as shown by previous Ipsos MORI research for Addenbrooke’s Hospital, and therefore does not explain the increase in numbers attending A&E between January and May. However, with the general increase in A&E attendances seen across England this year, the reputation of Addenbrooke’s Hospital may exacerbate the impact on its A&E; as patients attend from a wide-ranging area, a general increase may amplify the effect on Addenbrooke’s Hospital.

A higher proportion of patients contacted NHS 111 before attending A&E in May than in January, while fewer contacted their GP. It is possible that higher use of NHS 111 as it is rolled out more widely is actually increasing demand for A&E and driving patients there who perhaps would not have otherwise attended.

There has also been a slight increase between January and May in the proportion of people who have previously used Bedford A&E, perhaps suggesting that patients who would normally attend there have started presenting at Addenbrooke’s.

Some of the statistics:

- Most patients have used their GP practice in the last year (91%)
- After Addenbrooke’s A&E and their GP practice, pharmacies at the next most
commonly used service, with 79% having been to a pharmacy in the last year
- Around two in five have used NHS 111 (43%) or their local GP out of hours service (37%) in the last year
- Of the other urgent care services, those most highly used by patients who are aware of each service are the Minor Injuries Unit at the Princess of Wales Hospital (23%) and West Suffolk A&E (11%)
- There are very few differences in patterns of service use between January and May patients
- However, those who attended Addenbrooke’s A&E in May are more likely than those who attended in January to have used A&E at Bedford Hospital (95% of January patients have not used it in the last year compared with 99% of May patients).

The report also found:

Analysis of the types of patients visiting Addenbrooke’s A&E in January and May by age, gender and postcode has not identified any particular shifts in the types of patients accessing the department. This suggests that whatever is contributing to the increase in attendances is not affecting any particular age group, gender or area.

The data shows that satisfaction levels vary by service; however there are no significant differences between January and May that could explain why attendance has increased. However, satisfaction with Addenbrooke’s Hospital’s A&E department is high despite challenges meeting the waiting time target. While patients continue to be satisfied with the service they receive, they are likely to re-visit the department when they feel the need to access an A&E service.

A significant minority of patients are referred on to Addenbrooke’s A&E from other services, although this has not changed significantly between January and May and therefore does not explain the increase.

Of those who did contact another service first, GPs are the most commonly cited health service. Analysis of all visits to Addenbrooke’s A&E in January and May suggests that there has been an increase in numbers of patients attending from most practices, rather than a disproportionate number of patients from particular practices or new practices showing up in the data for May. Patients are just as positive about accessing GP services in May as in January; they are actually more positive on some aspects.