

Surge in parents taking kids with common medical problems to emergency care

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The number of children taken to emergency care departments with common medical problems has risen sharply over the past decade, reveals a study published online in *Emergency Medicine Journal*.

During the past 10 years, the way that the NHS provides care at night and at weekends for common medical problems has changed.

The family doctor is no longer responsible for providing that care and advice to worried parents, with large private companies now generally contracted to provide this instead.

Researchers looked at the medical records of children under the age of 15 who had attended the emergency department at Queen's Medical Centre in Nottingham between February 2007 and February 2008. These findings were compared with information about attendees a decade earlier.

During the 10 years, the number of patients attending the children's emergency department had remained similar, but the number attending with common medical problems had risen by 42%.

A total of 39,394 children were seen in 2007-8 of whom 14,724 had medical problems. This compared with 38,982 children seen overall in 1997 of whom 10,369 had medical problems .

Ten common [medical problems](#) accounted for 85% of the most visits,

including breathing difficulty, fever, [diarrhoea](#) with or without vomiting, rash and cough.

The proportions of patients attending for each of these conditions were similar in 1997 and 2007-8, except for [breathing difficulties](#).

"Over a 10-year period, attendances to the paediatric [emergency department](#) have remained similar; however, there has been a disproportionate rise in the number attending with medical conditions. The presenting problems also remain similar, although there has been a significant reduction in those presenting with difficulty in breathing," write the authors.

"Care pathways focusing on this limited range of high-volume presenting problems will make the maximum impact on improving quality and value of care for children," they add.

Provided by British Medical Journal

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