

Letter to the editor

Addressing the Unique Needs of Older Adults in the Emergency Department: An Important yet Neglected Issue

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SUMMARY

As the number of older adults seeking care in emergency departments (EDs) continues to rise, it is imperative that we prioritize research and reforms to enhance geriatric emergency care. The challenges facing older patients in the ED are multifaceted and complex.

***Keywords:* elderly, emergency department, needs**

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To the Editor,

As the number of older adults seeking care in emergency departments (EDs) continues to rise, it is imperative that we prioritize research and reforms to enhance geriatric emergency care. The challenges facing older patients in the ED are multifaceted and complex (1). Advanced age is often accompanied by multiple chronic conditions, polypharmacy, frailty, cognitive impairment, and social isolation — all of which can complicate assessment, diagnosis, and treatment in the fast-paced emergency setting. Moreover, standard ED protocols and workflows are frequently ill-suited to the unique needs of geriatric patients, leading to poor outcomes, extended lengths of stay, and higher rates of hospital admission and readmission (1, 2).

To address these pressing issues, it seems that we need to invest in the development of geriatric emergency medicine as a dedicated subspecialty. This would involve developing specialized training programs to equip emergency physicians, nurses, and allied health professionals with the expertise to provide age-friendly, comprehensive care for older adults. Curriculum enhancements could include advanced training in geriatric pharmacology, atypical disease presentations, functional assessment, and fa-

mily-centered communication (3). In tandem, we must ensure that EDs are physically designed and equipped to meet the needs of the elderly. This could entail incorporating features like non-slip flooring, adjustable exam tables, dementia-friendly signage, and dedicated quiet spaces. Additionally, integrating geriatric emergency care navigators or social workers into the ED team can help facilitate smooth transitions of care and connection to community resources (3, 4). Critically, research must continue to drive evidence-based improvements in this area. Studies are needed to identify best practices in geriatric triage, delirium prevention, medication management, and discharge planning, among other priorities. Funding for these research initiatives should be a key focus for federal and private granting agencies (5).

Suboptimal emergency care for older adults not only jeopardizes individual health and quality of life, but also strains the broader healthcare system through avoidable hospitalizations, complications, and long-term care placements (1, 2, 4). By elevating geriatric emergency medicine as a core priority, we have the opportunity to enhance outcomes, reduce unnecessary utilization, and better serve the rapidly growing older adult population.

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Article info

Received: June 4, 2024

Accepted: August 4, 2024

Online first: December 3, 2024

Podmirivanje jedinstvenih potreba starije populacije na odeljenjima urgentne medicine: značajno ali zapostavljeno pitanje

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SAŽETAK

Kako broj starijih osoba kojima treba pružiti negu na odeljenjima urgentne medicine nastavlja da raste, neophodno je dati prioritet istraživanjima i reformama kako bi se poboljšala nega gerijatrijske populacije. Izazovi sa kojima se suočavaju stariji bolesnici na ovim odeljenjima višestruki su i složeni.

Ključne reči: starija populacija, odeljenje urgentne medicine, potrebe