



# What is a pre-alert? Exploring ambulance and Emergency Department staff perspectives of the pre-alerts process.

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## Mixed methods: qualitative component

- 3 ambulance services, 6 Emergency Departments
- Semi-structured interviews : 35 ambulance clinicians, 40 ED clinicians
- 156 hours non-participant observation in EDs (143 p-a calls)
- Detailed observation notes, verbatim transcripts
- NVivo™ - Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke)



## What is the problem?

- Pre-alert calls key to managing time-critical patients in Emergency Department
- Judicious use is key in context of high demand for emergency care and crowded emergency departments.
- Is there a shared understanding of their purpose?

### Different perceptions of what a pre-alert is:

- Information provision – expectations of a **specific** response upon arrival (resus, other)
- Information giving – **no specific response** expected but handover of information for ED to decide
- Protocol driven ‘courtesy call’ – **no expectation of a specific response**
- ‘Heads up’ to inform the ED about a patient **who may not require a different response immediately** – concern about deterioration
- Advice about how to manage the patient, or where to take them.

“This is a pre-alert not an ‘asking permission’ “ [Amb 37]

Frustrations arose when ED and ambulance staff had **different expectations and perceptions** of a pre-alert.

This influenced future pre-alerting behaviour.

“I think the pre-alert system is great but I think it’s also the only system you’ve got to contact someone to just go “I’m not sure about this patient” [Amb 33]

### Different perceptions of a successful pre-alert:

#### Ambulance clinicians:

- Successful pre-alert = ‘accepted’ into resus
- Frustrated by perceived inaction

#### ED staff:

- Valued pre-alerts – create space etc.
- Unable to act due to lack of resources
- Valued psychological preparedness



### Implications

- Need to reframe perceptions of pre-alerts – no such thing as a ‘failed’ pre-alert
- Training into how to **undertake** and **receive** pre-alert calls should include consideration of and understanding of joint perspectives

