


Nurse triage line

▶ Intervention in brief

System wide:	Nurse triage lines are a telephonic service that assists patients in assessing symptoms and determining the appropriate site of care. The goal is to improve patient access to medical advice and ensure they pursue care in the right setting, reducing unnecessary utilization.
Strength of evidence	 <p>High</p>
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased cost: \$259-328 decreased cost per patient • Decreased utilization: Not demonstrated • Improved quality, clinical outcomes: 46-97% of patients safely triaged; 56-98% compliance rate; 44-98% of triage decisions deemed appropriate • Increased access: Not demonstrated • Improved stakeholder satisfaction: 55-97% patient satisfaction; 54% reduced workload for physicians
How to succeed	<p>To offer effective telephonic nurse triaging:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate patients about the existence of and how to appropriately use the triage line • Consider reassigning existing staff to service the triage line or centralize services • Train nurses to use evidence-based decision tools to route patients to the appropriate site of care • Operate triage line 24/7 to support patients after hours and on weekends • Coordinate with primary care providers to develop referral protocols and connect patients with ongoing preventive care <p>To learn more about an example of nurse triage lines, visit page 16 of our Reducing Avoidable Emergency Department Use brief here.</p>

▶ Demonstrated impact

Literature review summary

Title: What Evidence is There on the Effectiveness of Different Models of Delivering Urgent Care? A Rapid Review
Publication: National Institute for Health Research Journals Library
Date: 2015
Type: Systematic review
Study population: Mix of patients across 87 papers including the elderly (over 80 years old) or their proxies who used a nurse support line
Major findings:

- Reduced costs: \$265 net savings per patient
- Mixed quality and clinical outcomes: 46-97% of patients triaged were safe; 56-98% rates of compliance to nurse triage line instructions; 44-98% of triage decisions deemed appropriate
- Mixed rates of satisfaction: 55-97%
- Physician-reported reduced workload: 54%

Source: Full article [here](#).

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Title: An Economic Analysis of a Nurse-Led Telephone Triage Service

Publication: Journal of Telemedicine and Telecare

Date: 2014

Type: Retrospective cohort study

Study population: 132,509 patient phone calls in 2012

Major findings: Compliance with nurse recommendations via a phone line resulted in reduced average expenditures per caller (\$328).

Source: Full article [here](#).

Title: Listening to the Nurse Pays Off: An Integrated Nurse HealthLine Programme was Associated with Significant Cost Savings

Publication: Journal of Nursing Management

Date: 2014

Type: Case study

Study population: 53,206 patients aged 65 and older called the Nurse HealthLine triage program between January 1, 2010 and December 31, 2010

Major findings: Reduced costs: \$259 per patient

Source: Full article [here](#).

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Appendix

- Turner J, et al., “What Evidence is There on the Effectiveness of Different Models of Delivering Urgent Care? A Rapid Review,” *NIHR Journals Library*, 3, no. 43 (2015), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26632626>.
- Navratil-Strawn, et al., “An Economic Analysis of a Nurse-Led Telephone Triage Service,” *Journal of Telemedicine and Telecare*, 20, no. 6 (2014), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1357633X14545430>.
- Navratil-Strawn J, et al., “Listening to the Nurse Pays Off: An Integrated Nurse HealthLine Programme was Associated with Significant Cost Savings,” *Journal of Nursing Management*, 22, no. 7 (2014): 837-847, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23607510>.