



*****Media release*****

Research in Austin Hospital's Emergency Dept shows challenges in managing obese patients

Obesity significantly increases the difficulty of caring for patients in Austin Hospital's Emergency Department (ED).

This is the finding of a study by Associate Professor David Taylor from Austin Health, home to Victoria's busiest ED, and researcher Jeremy Kam of Melbourne University.

Of the 60,000 people treated in Austin Hospital's ED each year, 60 per cent range from overweight to morbidly obese.

"The doctors, nurses and radiographers treating 750 patients in Austin Hospital's Emergency Department were asked how a patient's obesity affected their difficulty in managing their patient," said Associate Professor Taylor. "They reported that the difficulty of treating overweight patients increases with their obesity."

A high body mass index (BMI) was found to be very strongly linked with more difficulty in finding anatomical landmarks, physical examination, patient positioning and procedures generally, especially inserting an intravenous cannula or taking blood samples.

"For the first time, our research quantifies the correlation between obesity and management difficulty," said Associate Professor Taylor.

While doctors experienced more difficulties than nurses and radiographers, generally management difficulty did not increase until the BMI was in the obese or morbidly obese range.

"While there are challenges associated with treating very overweight people, there are costs associated with providing this care," said Associate Professor Taylor. "Bigger patients may need bigger beds and chairs, and staff may need lifting equipment to move them. Even items like blood pressure cuffs need to be upsized."

Associate Professor Taylor will present results of the study in poster format during the annual scientific meeting of the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine, which will be held at the Melbourne Convention Centre November 15-19.