

Non-urgent pre-hospital patient management: is there a gap between their needs and paramedics' skills? A Swiss case.

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A major shift in health issues

As in many European countries, Switzerland is experiencing a **major shift in health issues** due to aging population and the constant increase of chronic diseases. Consequently, ambulance interventions have drastically raised, challenging the emergency system¹. This shift is associated with a large proportion of patients having a low severity score (patient NACA score 0-3), which accounts for more than 80% of the ambulance interventions (Figure 1).

The paramedic's role, initially aimed at responding to life-threatening situations, may now be challenged by the ongoing epidemiologic changes in the population.

Our study investigates the adequacy of paramedic skills to respond to this unprecedented raise of non-urgent patients.

Collecting information

A literature review, including grey literature, was undertaken. Interviews were conducted with emergency healthcare providers, Swiss Paramedics Association executives, educational programs managers and Public Health representatives.

Non-urgent patients: a challenge

- **Non-urgent patient management challenges the whole health system**, involving pre-hospital professionals and hospital emergency departments. To deal with similar issues, some European countries have implemented new educational programmes for paramedics.
- No study in Switzerland has explored the adequacy of paramedics' skills to assess, treat and refer, in their current practice, this large proportion of non-urgent patients.

A need to identify the gap

- An exploratory study is essential to **identify to what extent there is a mismatch between the paramedic scope of practice and the management of non-urgent patients**. This research should involve the main actors of the prehospital care system.
- Further investigation is necessary to analyse the outcomes of the new pre-hospital paradigms implemented to overcome this issue in Europe.

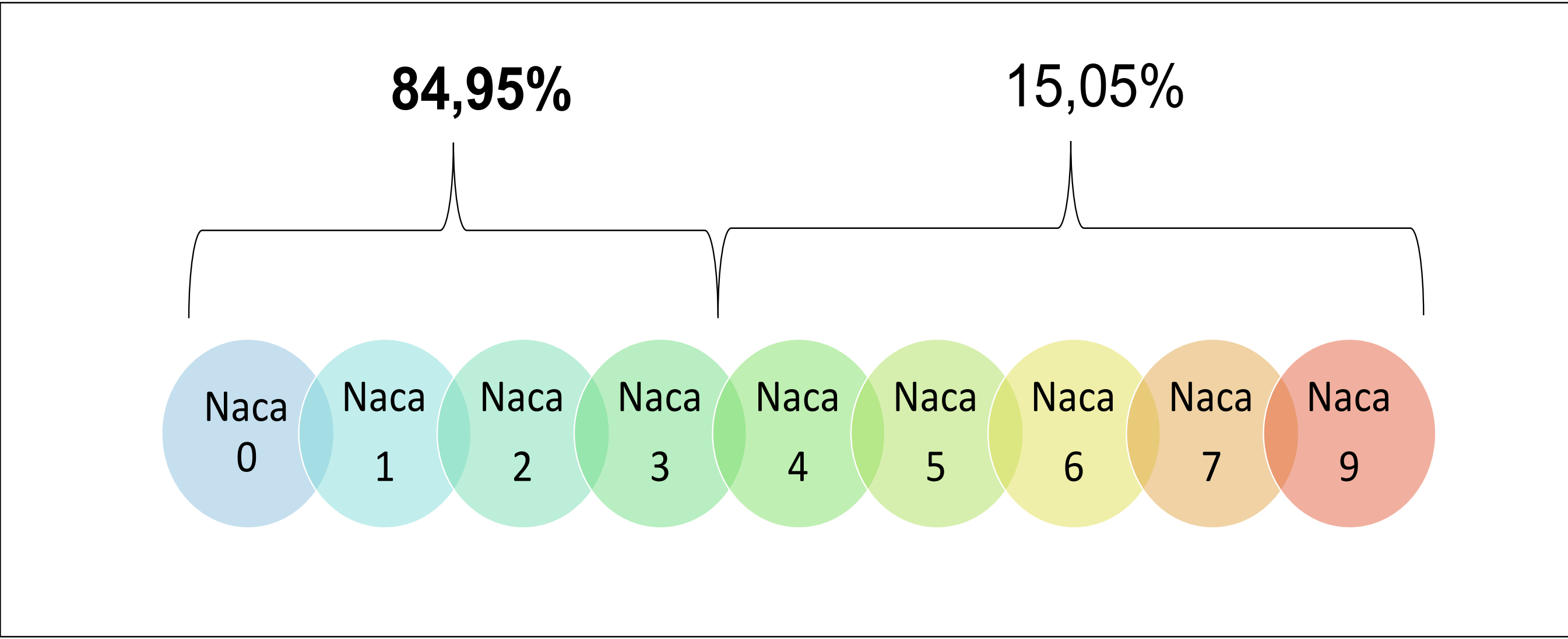


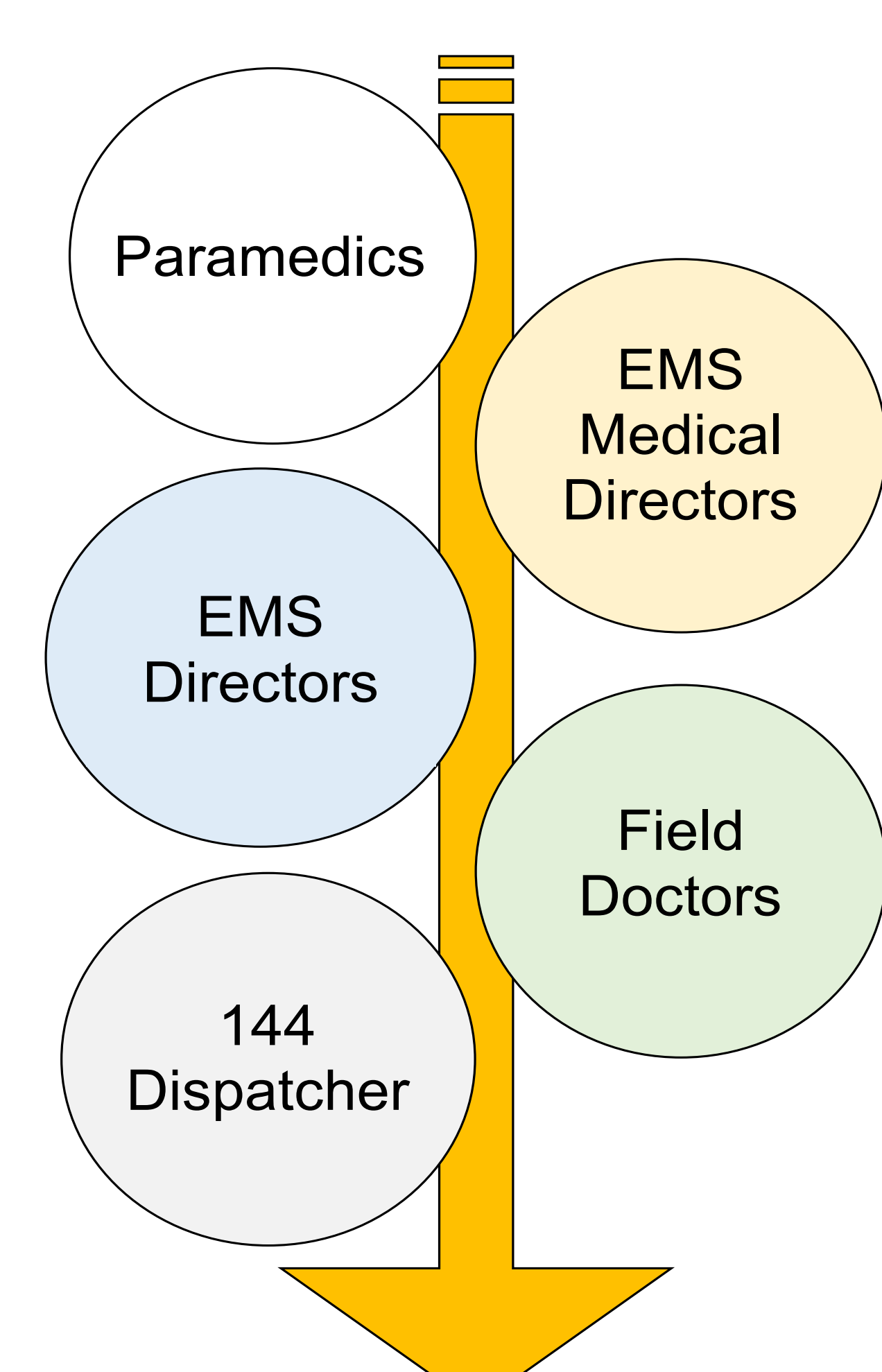
Figure 1. Prehospital NACA score distribution in Vaud canton Switzerland in 2017, primary interventions. Source: Direction Générale de la Santé Vaud (2018) [Personal Communication].

The National Advisory Committee of Aeronautics (NACA) score is used by EMS in Vaud canton to grade the severity of a patient's illness or injuries². For instance, a NACA 0 is assigned to a patient with no injury or disease while a NACA 5 means acute threat to life.

Ongoing 2019

FOCUS GROUPS

"What are the perceived limitations and difficulties of non-urgent patient management by paramedics?"



Identify the limitations in paramedic training, skills and scope of practice.

Highlight the potential of the prehospital sector in assessment, treatment and referral of non-urgent patients.

Provide recommendations on paramedic educational programmes and scope of practice.

Figure 2. Focus groups by profession: perceptions and conceptions about emblematic situations in low NACA score patient management by the paramedics.

References:

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