

IMPACT OF FREE CHOICE OF IBD CENTER ON THE WORKLOAD OF NURSES IN A TERTIARY CARE CENTER

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BACKGROUND:

Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) is on the rise worldwide, including Slovenia, where approximately 9,000 patients live with the condition and about 100 new cases are diagnosed each year (1). Twelve IBD centers operate in Slovenia, with the tertiary center at the University Medical Centre Ljubljana (UMC Ljubljana) managing the largest patient load. Due to patients' free choice of treatment center, the workload of nurses at the tertiary center exceeds recommended standards, raising concerns about quality and sustainability of care.

METHODS:

A cross-sectional survey was conducted between June and August 2025 among 356 patients from other regions who sought care at UMC Ljubljana. Data were collected on patients' experiences with regional centers, motives for choosing the tertiary center, and values they prioritize in healthcare.

RESULTS:

Nearly 40% of patients treated at UMC Ljubljana come from outside the central Slovenian region (Figure 1). Among them, 74% had never visited their regional center. Of those who had, two-thirds rated the regional center as worse, one-third as equivalent, and none as better than the tertiary center. The main reasons for choosing the tertiary center were belief in broader and better treatment (33%) and higher trust (30%) (Table 1). Patients identified professionalism, communication, timeliness, empathy, and continuity of staff as the most important aspects of care (Table 2).

CONCLUSION:

The voluntary influx of patients into the tertiary center exceeds the international staffing standard (1 nurse per 500 patients)(2), increasing the risk of reduced quality of care and nurse burnout. This highlights a key challenge for the Slovenian healthcare system: strengthening visibility, accessibility, and professional standards of regional centers to ensure high-quality care closer to patients' homes. Adjustments to staffing policies and enhancing the reputation of regional centers could help balance workloads and support sustainable care delivery.

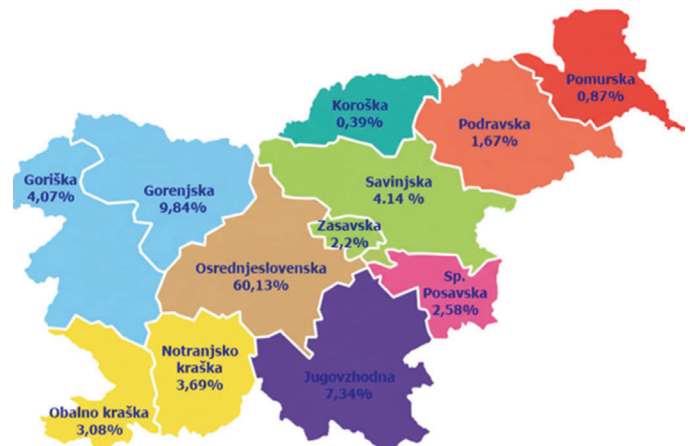


Figure 1: Regional Origin of Patients Treated at the IBD Outpatient Clinic, University Medical Centre Ljubljana (as of 31 August 2025)

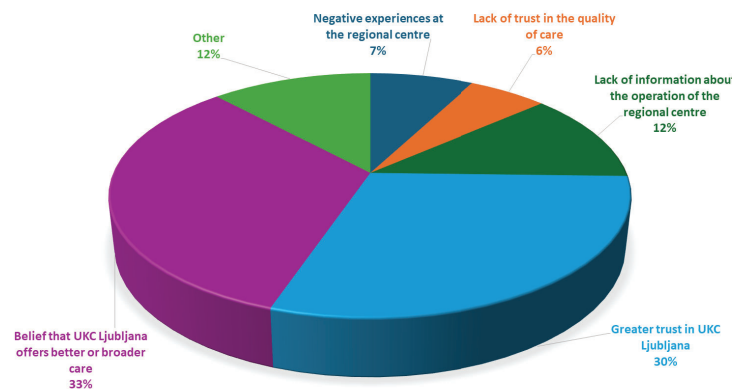


Table 1: Reasons for Choosing a Tertiary IBD Centre Over a Regional Centre

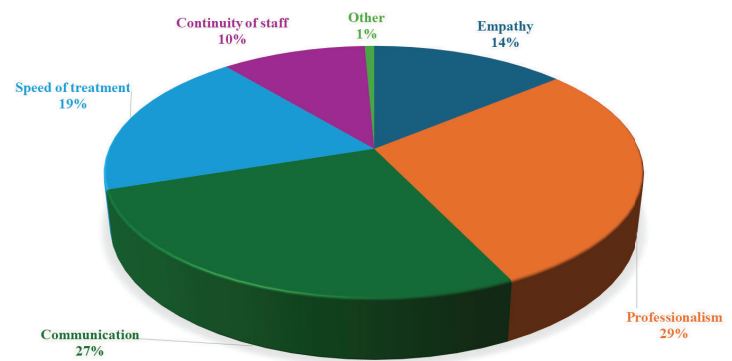


Table 2: What is most important in healthcare?

REFERENCE:

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