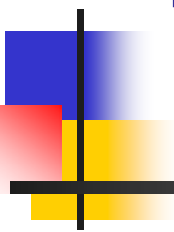


Impact of telephone triage on medical service use: implications for rural and remote areas



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The Triage Service

- 24 / 7
- Bilingual service
- Northern Ontario (pilot - 22 months)
- Trained registered nurses
- Clinical guidelines
- Health information topics
- Advise on the most appropriate level of care



Goals of Telephone Triage

- Reduce unnecessary demand on existing health care resources (e.g., EDs, walk-in clinics)
- Promote patient independence and confidence in health decision-making



Evaluation Components

- Description of Pilot Project
- Description of calls and callers
- Program awareness and caller satisfaction
- Audit of the appropriateness of teletriage advice
- **Effect on medical service use**
- **Effect on informal care (self-care and care for others)**
- Compliance
- Economic evaluation
- CQI assessment
- Policy implications



Methods -1

- Mail survey of consenting callers
 - Use of health care services
 - Socio-economic & demographic characteristics
- February – June 2001
- 5475 questionnaires mailed out
- 2389 complete & valid responses (44%)



Methods -2

Stage in Decision Process

Patient's intent → Nurse's advice → Patient's action

Service Use

- Visit ED
- Visit MD office/Clinic
- Informal care (self-care or care for others)
- Use of other health care services

	Intent	Advice	Action
Visit ED			
Visit MD			
Informal			
Other			



Methods -3

- Geographic categories - 1996 Census
- Statistical Area Classification
 - CMA/CA } n=1544
 - CMA/CA Influenced Zones (MIZ)
 - Commuter (worker) flows to CMA/CA
 - Strong MIZ >30% of workers } n=208
 - Moderate MIZ >5% and <30% } n=208
 - Weak MIZ >0% and <5% } n=554
 - No MIZ =0%



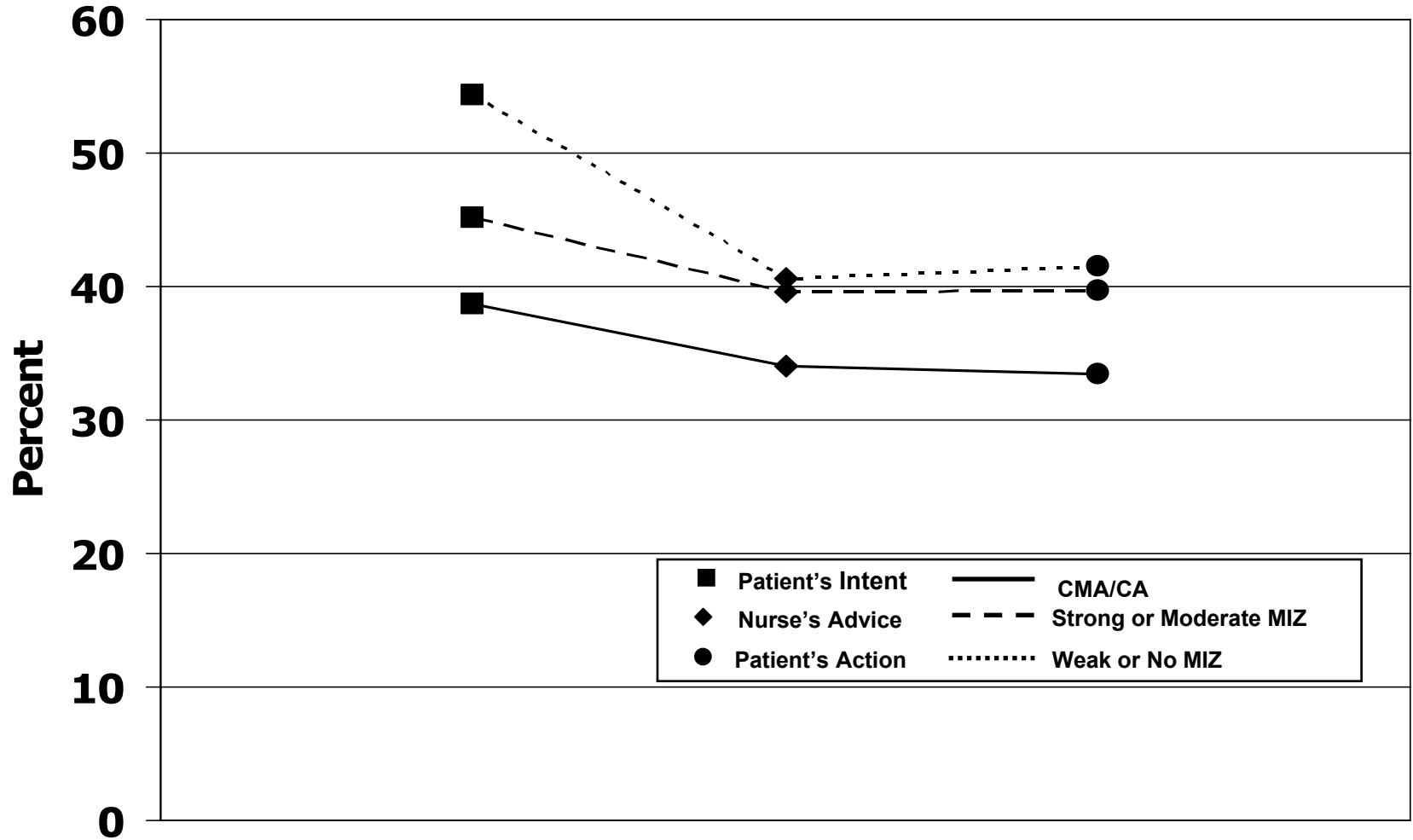
Results

Type of health care used (ED or MD office/clinic or Informal care only)

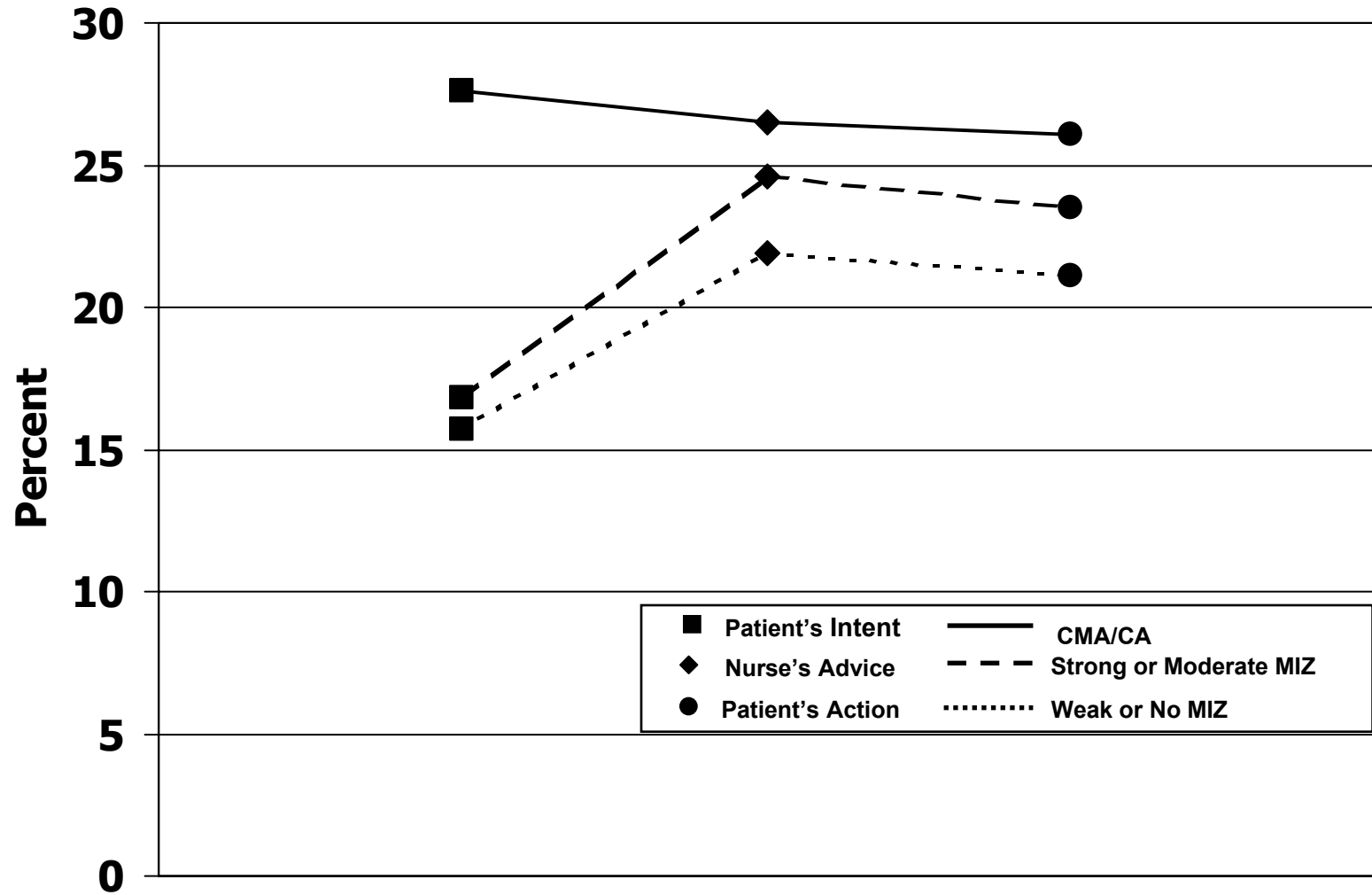
Varied with...

- Stage in Decision Process (intent, advice and action)
- Patient's location (commuter flow category)

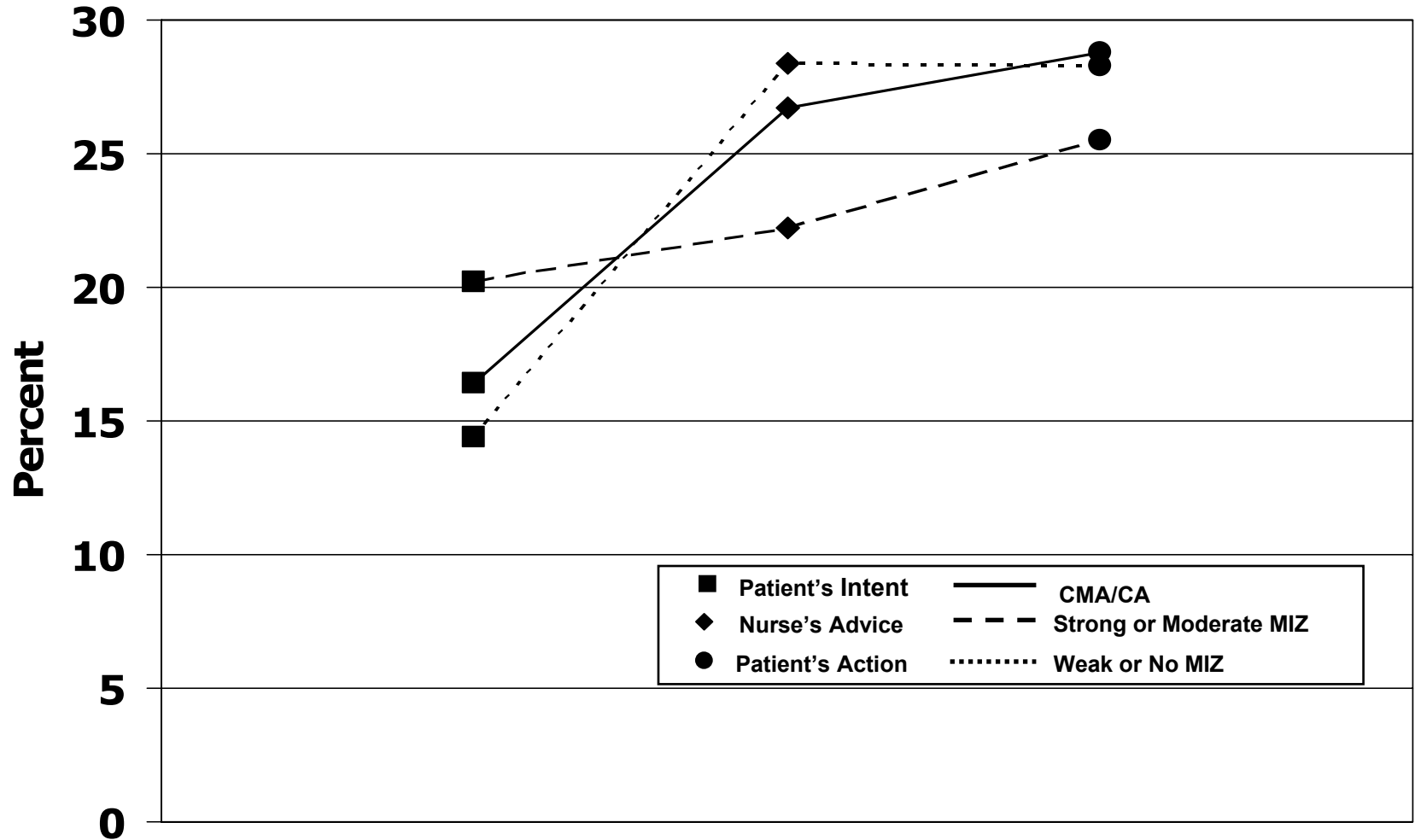
Visit ED



Visit MD office/clinic



Informal Care Only



Trends -1

intent --> advice --> action

- Visit the ED
 - Decrease
 - Strongest in rural areas
- Visit the MD
 - Increase
 - Strong in rural areas
 - Strongest in intermediate areas

Trends -2

intent --> advice --> action

- Informal care only
 - Increase
 - Strongest in rural areas
 - Strong in urban areas
 - Intermediate in intermediate areas

Statistical significance of trends??



Comparing MIZ

- Visit the ED
 - Significantly higher for rural callers
- Visit the MD office/clinic
 - Significantly lower for rural callers
- Informal care only
 - NSD
- Use other types of health care
 - NSD



Summary

- Teletriage may be directing callers...
 - away from ED visits
 - towards visits to MD office/clinics or
 - towards informal care
- Effect may be strongest for rural callers



Conclusions

- Triage is one of several factors influencing medical service use
- Results suggest that triage may be directing rural callers away from ED visits towards MD office/clinic visits or towards informal care



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