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Title: Evaluation of the Basel hospital merger project in Switzerland

Presenting Author(s): André Moser¹

Institutes: 1) Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Prevention Institute, Department of Epidemiology, University of Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland
2) Kantonsspital Baselland, Liestal, Switzerland
3) Swiss Health Observatory, Neuchâtel, Switzerland

Authors (s): André Moser¹, Tarun Mehra², Viktor von Wyl¹, Marcel Widmer³, Matthias Bopp¹, Milo Puhan¹

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Background: Switzerland has one of the highest health care expenditures among the OECD countries, with a share of 12.4% of the gross domestic product in the year 2016. Due to the Swiss Health Insurance Act Revision in 2012, hospitals were required to optimise their in-house processes and discuss possible structural changes to be more cost-efficient without impairing quality of medical care. The discussion about consolidated health care entities to reduce the increasing trend of health care costs in Switzerland is a public and political topic. However, evidence of the impact of hospital mergers is lacking. The cantonal governments of Basel-Stadt and Basel-Landschaft approved the merger of the University Hospital of Basel and the cantonal hospitals of Basel-Landschaft, to a common hospital group in the year 2020. This specific study setting allows to investigate the hospital merger impact on health service costs, quality and utilisation.

Research questions: We want to investigate how the hospital consolidation will influence patterns of costs, quality and patient flow in Hospital Service Areas (HSA) of the Greater Basel area for different medical interventions, patient subpopulations and health care service types, and will compare it with other Swiss regions.

Methods: We will define HSA using a described methodology for the Swiss setting. We will use multivariable regression models to assess indicators of health care services before and after the hospital consolidation, and its impact. Our aim is to build a cohort of patients which allows the investigation of long-term trends.

Implications: This is the first study in Switzerland which investigates the impact of hospital mergers on changes in health care system costs, quality, and utilisation. Our results will inform local and national health care providers and policy makers, and may support future health care consolidation projects in Switzerland.