Intensive care units (ICUs) specialize in the care of critically ill. One important decision faced by ICU physicians is when to transfer patients from their unit to a more richly staffed or equipped ICU. When faced with such scenarios, physicians need to act quickly to minimize the time to appropriate care, and thus reduce the patient’s risk for organ failure or death. Unnecessary transfers, however, may not benefit all patients, can strain expensive and scare resources of an already busy receiving ICU, delay care for patients who do require more specialized care, or cause unnecessary stress to the patient and staff.

To address these tradeoffs, we present a systematic framework for making ICU transfer decisions. We use Generalized Estimating Equations and binary logistic regression to estimate each patient’s need to transfer. We then evaluate threshold-based policies that balance the need to correctly transfer patients that need to be transferred and the need to avoid unnecessary transfers. Our model is calibrated and validated on 646 pediatric patients seen at pediatric ICU units in Michigan. We show that, by using this framework, it is possible to significantly reduce transfer delays.

**Dr. Mariel Lavieri** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Industrial and Operations Engineering at the University of Michigan. She has bachelor’s degrees in Industrial and Systems Engineering and Statistics and a minor in String Bass Performance from the University of Florida. She holds a Masters and PhD in Management Science from the University of British Columbia. In her work, she applies operations research to healthcare topics. Her most recent research develops dynamic programming, stochastic control, and continuous, partially observable state space models to guide screening, monitoring and treatment decisions of chronic disease patients. She has also developed models for health workforce planning which take into account training requirements, workforce attrition, capacity planning, promotion rules and learning. Dr. Lavieri is the recipient of the Bonder Scholarship, and an honorary mention in the George B. Dantzig Dissertation award. She received the 2009 Pierskalla Award for the best paper presented in the Health Applications Society at INFORMS, mentored the students who won the 2012 Doing Good with Good OR, received an honorary mention from the Public Programs, Services and Needs 2013 paper competition, and was named the 2013 Young Participant with Most Practical Impact by the International Conference on Operations Research.

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