

Virtual Mentor

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VIEWPOINT

The State of Emergency

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- There were 108 million visits to ERs in 2000 – a 14 percent increase from the 95 million ER patients in 1997.¹
- Average patient wait time is 41 minutes for an emergency and 1 hour for a non-urgent visit, while the average total visit time is 2 hours and 40 minutes.²
- Most visits occur between 4:00 PM – 7:59 PM; Monday is the ER's busiest day.²
- According to a study by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, waiting time for non-urgent emergencies has increased 33 percent.¹

What is an emergency condition?

- According to the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act an emergency condition is defined by the presence of acute symptoms, including severe pain, of sufficient severity that the absence of immediate medical attention could reasonably be expected to result in:
 - Placing the health of the individual in serious jeopardy,
 - Serious impairment to bodily functions or,
 - Serious dysfunction of any bodily organ or part⁴
 - Uninsured Americans, who now number close to 40 million, are likely to use emergency departments for routine care.¹

In light of the health care shortages and overcrowding in ERs, some hospitals have found a way to guarantee shorter waits without compromising quality of care.

- Oakwood Health Care in southeast Michigan guarantees patients are seen by a doctor in 30 minutes or they will receive free movie tickets and a personal apology.
 - They have seen a 50 percent increase in patient volume.² Average wait to see an ER physician decreased from several hours to 22 minutes at the Oakwood center.⁴
- Northern Nevada Medical Center gives a 15-minute guarantee or your ER visit is free. They have seen a 54 percent increase in patient volume.²
 - The success of this campaign has prompted an expansion that will double the size of the department by June 2003.⁵

References

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