



Emergency Medicine: What to Expect as a Patient in the 'ER'

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Getting injured in an accident, falling and breaking a bone, experiencing sudden chest pain or severe abdominal pain—these are the kinds of unexpected, alarming circumstances that necessitate emergency treatment. The Emergency Care Center (ECC) at Sturdy Memorial Hospital is staffed by a team of medical professionals who are extensively trained, and always ready, to assess and treat everything from minor lacerations and burns, to serious, life-threatening emergency conditions such as stroke and diabetic coma, as quickly as possible. We understand that people who arrive at the ECC are undergoing some level of fear and anxiety over their acute illness or injury. The unfamiliarity of the people, surroundings, and experiences in an emergency care facility could add to this stress. So to alleviate some concern, should you ever go through something that requires immediate medical attention, we'd like to help you understand what the emergency room experience would be like:

- **Triage:** Upon arrival at the ECC, you will sign in at the Registration desk, where you will be triaged (assessed) based on the severity and acuity of your condition. You will describe your problem(s) to the triage nurse, who will assess your condition. Patients whose conditions are time-sensitive and at a higher level of severity and acuity are moved to the treatment area for rapid medical intervention (e.g. resuscitation and stabilization). Patients with minor injuries or illnesses are seen according to arrival.
- **Treatment:** When your name is called, you will be escorted to a room in the treatment area, either in the main Emergency Department area, or if the problem is less acute, in our Quick Care area. If you receive treatment in the main Emergency Department area, an emergency medicine physician will perform an examination, gather your medical history, and explain what testing and treatment you will need. In the Quick Care area, you will be cared for by either a physician, nurse

practitioner, or physician assistant. A registered nurse or patient care assistant will be your advocate and track your condition during your stay in the ECC.

- **Disposition:** Once your test results are available and your diagnosis and treatment plan is made, your physician will determine your disposition (outcome) of your ECC visit. If you need further medical care and observation, you will be admitted to a patient room on one of the Hospital's nursing units. If the physician determines it would be safe and appropriate for you to be discharged home, you will receive discharge instructions, which will include a description of at-home care and, if needed, prescriptions. Certain conditions such as a heart attack may require a cardiac intervention, necessitating transfer to a larger, tertiary hospital.
- **Waiting Time:** The amount of time patients spend in an emergency care facility varies. Waiting time to get to the treatment area depends on the severity of the patient's condition, and for patients with less severe conditions, waiting time also depends on emergency room volume. Volume can change quickly. While an influx of patients is anticipated during flu season, an influx of patients entering the ECC or a rush of ambulances could happen at any time of day, any day of the year. Sturdy is prepared to treat emergencies 24 hours a day and has plans in place to handle increases in patient volume. But we can't guarantee waiting times. Because waiting times in emergency care settings are so unpredictable and could change from one minute to the next, we don't want to misinform or deter patients needing immediate medical attention by publishing waiting times.
- **Total Visit Time:** Once patients are in the treatment area, they may need diagnostic testing. The types and number of diagnostic tests needed, including the preparatory times for those tests, factor into the total time of emergency visits. For example, ultrasounds may call for a full bladder, which could take up to an hour to achieve by drinking or intravenously taking fluids. Or there could be, for instance, a wait for a CT scan because some tests require drinking a contrast agent or "dye" that takes time to get in your system. But during the waiting times for tests and test

results, pain medications or antibiotics are administered right away when necessary so that patients can start to feel better as soon as possible.

To lessen waiting times in the ECC and facilitate treatments for less severe conditions such as sprains, flu-like symptoms, suspected bone fractures without deformity, and back pain, Sturdy offers its Quick Care service, available every day from 9am – 11pm. Sturdy also offers walk-in services at Mansfield Health Center, located at 200 Copeland Drive in Mansfield, and the primary care physicians in Sturdy Memorial Associates offer same-day sick visit appointments for their patients. So if you have an illness or injury that isn't severe but warrants immediate medical attention, consider these options and call your physician, who knows you best and can determine, by your present symptoms and your medical history, where you should seek treatment. But if your symptoms are serious, visit the nearest emergency room right away or call 9-1-1.

Sturdy Memorial Hospital's Emergency Care Center, open 24 hours a day, treats more than 50,000 visits annually. For more information about Sturdy, the ECC, or the Quick Care service, visit www.sturdymemorial.org.