Why Are Emergency Departments Overcrowded?

Hospital emergency departments are the only place in the health care system where people can go for medical help any time of the day or night. No one can be turned away; it’s the law.

Over the past decade, more and more people are coming to emergency departments. A large number of people who need emergency care are the elderly who often have complex illnesses, as well as people who are uninsured. People without health insurance often wait until they become very sick before turning to emergency departments for care.

Very sick patients often need to be admitted to the hospital, but if no beds are available, they have to wait in the emergency department until one opens up. This practice is known as “boarding.” It can back up the emergency department and cause other patients to wait even longer for care. Boarding also may cause the hospital to divert ambulances to less crowded emergency departments. Unfortunately, hospitals today are facing financial difficulties, which means they may not be able to afford additional staff or beds to resolve the boarding problem.

Even though emergency departments are not designed to provide comfort to patients who must stay overnight or even for a few days, the emergency staff will do everything possible to make your stay comfortable.

What Can You Do?

America’s hospitals and emergency departments need YOUR support so we can continue to meet your medical needs and serve the best interests of the community. Help solve the overcrowding crisis by contacting your U.S. Representative and U.S. Senators and urging them to get involved and help hospitals solve this problem.

To contact your U.S. Representative or U.S. Senators, call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121.

To write to your U.S. Representative look for his or her address in the front of your local telephone book or by visiting: http://www.house.gov/writerep/.

To write to your two U.S. Senators look for their addresses in the front of your local telephone book or by visiting: www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm

To learn more about these issues, visit the American College of Emergency Physicians’ Web site at www.ACEP.org.