

Hospital Name:
Atlantic General Hospital

Address:
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Berlin, MD 21811

Contact:
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2006 ED Volume: 27,753
Growth from 2005: 4.6%
Total Staffed Hospital Beds: 44
Acute ED Beds: 19
Fast Track? Yes
Clinical Decision Unit? No

Problem to be Resolved:
Long waits in the ED

Tools Provided:
▪ Flyer

Key Words:
▪ 30 Minute Promise
▪ Through put
▪ Patient tracking
▪ Digital x-ray
▪ Hospitalist

Lessons Learned:
Interdepartmental cooperation and a strong commitment by staff in the ED and registration department were essential to the success of this program.

Reason for Change:

Staff at Atlantic General Hospital felt the long waits that are so common in EDs nationwide are bad for both patient care and satisfaction. They felt that if they could do something to decrease time spent waiting in their ED, then they might be able to attract more patients who previously have visited other area EDs. They wanted to let the public know that even though they have to wait at most EDs throughout the country, they shouldn't have to wait to receive necessary emergency care, and Atlantic General Hospital would make efforts to eliminate this waiting.

Implementation:

Atlantic General Hospital decided to implement a 30 Minute ER Promise, which guarantees that a patients will be placed in an exam room or begin to receive treatment, such as pain medication, x-ray, or lab tests, within 30 minutes of arrival at the hospital. If the guarantee is not met, the patient will receive a gift card as compensation.

About one year prior to beginning the 30 minute guarantee, Atlantic General began making changes and fine-tuning processes to help speed delivery of care. One change that was made was switching to a digital radiology system. Now when an x-ray is taken, a digital copy is immediately available. Previously this was a lengthy process because the x-ray needed to be taken to a separate area to be developed. This change has helped speed things up in the ED as well as throughout the hospital.

The ED also updated the patient tracking system. When a patient arrives in the ED, his or her information is entered into a handheld computer. The triage staff can use this information to prioritize care, making sure that those patients whose ailments are relatively minor are sent to the fast track area while those with more serious conditions receive immediate care.

Another change that Atlantic General made was to the process of admitting patients from the ED. Instead of having a patient wait in the ED until the admitting physician can come and evaluate, the ED physician will discuss the patient's situation with a hospitalist. After initial tests are performed, the patient is sent to an inpatient unit to await a full diagnosis. Staff feel that this change has been important, because getting a patient into an inpatient unit for care quickly is essential for improving the quality of care and increasing patient satisfaction, as well as reducing crowding in the ED.

Initially some physicians were concerned that in order to provide faster care, the quality of care would diminish. They worried about the implications in terms of malpractice.

In order to ensure that the care provided in the ED is both fast and of high quality, performance is measured by time, volume, and quality outcome indicators.

Results/Impact:

Shortly after beginning the 30 Minute ER Promise, Atlantic General Hospital found that they had purchased too many gift cards, anticipating that they would have trouble meeting the guarantee. However, during the first three months (February, March, and April), they met this goal 99 percent of the time. Even during Labor Day weekend, when the hospital saw an increase in ED visits because of so many tourists in the area, the goal was still met 95.9 percent of the time.