

# “Quick Care” for non-emergent patients reduces wait times, improves patient experience in the ED

STURDY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

For more than a century, Sturdy Memorial Hospital has served patients in and around Attleboro, expanding from 15 to 132 beds with a team of more than 1,500 employees. Some 7,000 patients are admitted annually and nearly 50,000 are treated in the 32-bed emergency department (ED).

## Challenge

As the hospital has grown, so too have demands for care. In the ED particularly, an increase in visits led to longer wait times. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, EDs across the country recorded 136.9 million visits in 2015. In only one-third of these visits, patients were seen in fewer than 15 minutes.

## Action

To address the challenges associated with increased volume, Sturdy Memorial brought together a multidisciplinary team to evaluate patient flow in the ED and develop quality improvement interventions. The group observed and documented work processes and patient flow, as well as staffing structure, team interactions and task loads. They quickly discovered that about one-quarter of all visits were low-acuity in nature and patients who could be seen quickly were being grouped with mid-acuity patients who needed more time with physicians.

Through a collaborative method, the staff implemented a fast track process to reduce wait times, improve the patient experience and enhance the delivery of care. They started by developing new triage guidelines and establishing Quick Care within the ED where low-acuity patients could be seen and treated.

With the new criteria, a nurse triages patients in the waiting area, documenting symptoms, medical history and vitals and begins any necessary treatments or testing, such as urinalysis or X-rays. Based on the guidelines, the triage nurse can separate non-emergent patients from the main ED to Quick Care, which reduces overall wait times, minimizes delays in patient care and improves patient satisfaction.

Conditions that are usually managed in Quick Care include sore throats, upper respiratory and ear infections, rashes, cuts and lacerations, sprains and strains and insect and tick bites. To streamline patient flow on an ongoing basis, Quick Care is open every day from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m., measurably the period with the heaviest patient volume.

## Outcomes

Sturdy Memorial has seen a dramatic improvement in patient flow and a reduction in ED wait times. Low-acuity patients are no longer forced to wait behind true emergency cases. Patients request to be seen in Quick Care, where more than 25 percent of visits are handled. With a targeted goal of a 90-minute turnaround time for patients, the length of stay for those in Quick Care averages one and a half versus three hours on the main ED side. The team reviews the triage guidelines every year, often expanding the requirements to allow more visits to be handled in Quick Care.