
EMERGENCY ROOM CHECKLIST — BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER

BE PREPARED

- Visiting the Emergency Room (the ER) of a hospital can be a traumatic and stressful experience for anyone. Taking a moment to learn how the ER works and what to expect before the emergency happens helps.
- Research the psychiatric facilities in your area. Some hospitals do not have psychiatric units for inpatient stays, some hospitals will only be able to stabilize your relative through the ER and then release them. Knowing the hospitals and treatment centers will help ensure that your loved one receives the best possible treatment.
- You may also want to visit the hospital to make sure you are comfortable driving there if you need to. This can help reduce anxiety and ensure a smoother process should you or a loved one require emergency services.
- The American College of Emergency Physicians recommends keeping an "emergency file" containing all pertinent information about your loved ones medical history. This can be kept in a folder that you can easily grab on the way out the door should an ER visit be necessary. It should contain:
 - Your loved ones insurance cards
 - A list of all medications your loved one is taking. If you do not have the exact medications and dosages written out, bring all of your pill bottles with you to show the ER staff.
 - A list of any chronic conditions your loved one may have and medical history including operations and allergies (particularly drug allergies) that your loved one has. You can also include copies of recent laboratory or diagnostic test results. Doing so may help reduce both the cost and waiting time associated with your ER visit.
 - Written psychiatric diagnosis (see if your loved ones doctor will write a letter for you) and treatment regimen, including dosage, so they can administer the necessary treatment without delay. Make sure the letter includes your physician's name and number if the ER physician needs more information.
 - The phone numbers of every member of your loved ones treatment team.

WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

- Calling 9-1-1 for assistance may be your best option.
 - Be specific. Be sure to clearly say your relationship to your loved one, where you are, what your loved one is doing, what their diagnosis is and why you need assistance. For example "My son, Brian, is 21 and has bi-polar disorder. He is manic and we will not let him inside the house because he has threatened my husband. He is kicking and punching the door. We need assistance, we cannot help him and he needs to go to the hospital." Montgomery County tries to send one of their specially trained police officers on calls involving a mentally ill individual. Being this clear will help 9-1-1 send appropriate assistance to your loved one.
 - Once the emergency team arrives give them the space they need to let them do their jobs. They are not likely to respond to your requests or suggestions, especially if they have not been able to assess the situation and take appropriate action so that everyone is safe.
 - Calling an ambulance may restrict your choices of an ER facility, since ambulance drivers may be required to take you to the nearest facility that is accepting patients. However, calling 9-1-1 is always best if your emergency situation poses any threat to life or if you are physically unable to travel by car. The paramedics who arrive on the scene can begin treating your emergency immediately and can continue treatment en route to the hospital.
- If you choose to drive your loved one to the hospital make sure that everyone will be safe. If you have any doubts about your safety or your loved one's safety in the car consider calling 9-1-1. People in depressed, manic or psychotic states may not be OK in the confined space of a car. Make sure that

everyone in the car uses a seatbelt. Keep doors locked (and use child locks) to make sure that your loved one does not exit the car while it is moving. Whenever possible have another person in the vehicle with you to ensure that you will be able to focus on driving which may be difficult if your loved one is having outbursts.

- If you have a chronic illness that requires frequent visits to the hospital, utilizing emergency services at the same location can help speed your care, since the doctors have access to all of your medical history and information.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE HOME

- *Call your loved one's treatment center or physician.* Let them know that you are on your way to the ER with your loved one.
- *Know the diagnosis.* Have your loved ones exact diagnosis firmly in your mind or, better yet, written out.
- *Be prepared to answer specific questions* about the reason you brought your loved one to the ER.

WHAT TO BRING WITH YOU

- Your "emergency file"
- Pack a change of clothes and toothbrush for you and your loved one if you think your loved one may be admitted. If you drive your loved one to the hospital you may want to have an over night bag stored in the trunk of the vehicle – the idea of staying at the hospital may be scary to your loved one. Keeping a bag in the trunk could make it easier to get your loved one in the car and to the ER.
- Snacks, books, music to keep yourself entertained while waiting at the ER.
- Your knowledge of your illness or your loved ones illness. Don't expect ER personnel to be experts on mental illness. Know enough about your disorder and its treatment to be able to explain it to personnel.

AT THE ER

- **Expect to wait** - Hospitals treat critical patients first, and your loved one may not be the most urgent case. Bring items to help your loved one pass the time, such as coloring books and toys for young children or a book or ipod. Don't forget diversions for yourself!
- **Comfort your loved one** - Hospitals can be scary places, so let your loved one know that this is the place to get better. Tell him or her what to expect to ease some of the anxiety. Don't lose your cool; if you're calm, your loved one is more likely to be, too.
- **Be specific with the triage nurse** - Upon arrival at the ER, unless you arrive by ambulance with a life-threatening injury, you will most likely be assessed by a triage nurse, who will take a brief history of your condition, measure your vital signs (blood pressure, temperature, pulse and respiratory rates), and prioritize your case in terms of urgency. Describe your problems in specific and precise terms. Don't downplay the situation.
- **Make your loved one comfortable** - Bring along your loved ones favorite blanket or pillow. Work with the ER staff to help them better help your loved one to relax during treatments.
- **Be patient but persistent** - If you have not received treatment after a reasonable amount of time, contact your loved ones treatment center or your loved ones primary care physician.
- **Stay informed and in charge, but aware of HIPAA** - If your loved one is under the age of 18 the ER staff should speak with you about the next steps that will be taken. If your loved on is 18 or older they will not be able to provide you with very much information without written consent from your loved one due to HIPAA regulations. This can be very frustrating for family members but the hospital staff is only doing what they are required to do by law.
- **Be polite** - Always treat ER personnel with the respect and dignity you want for yourself. Your calmness and dignity lays the groundwork for a positive collaboration with the ER staff.

- **Get ready to take notes** - Bring a pen and paper to jot down what doctors and nurses tell you about your loved one's condition, any treatment he or she receives, follow-up care instructions and the names of medical personnel who see your loved one.
- **Don't be afraid to ask questions** - ERs can be crowded, confusing places. While errors are uncommon, they may occur. When you receive any medications, diagnostic procedures, or treatments, ask what is being done and why. Don't hesitate to speak up if you are unsure of anything.
- **More waiting** - Be aware that if you must be admitted to the hospital, you may have to wait some time before you are taken to your room.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE HOSPITAL

- **Insist on a Discharge Plan** - It is critically important that your loved one have a clearly defined set of instructions when they leave the hospital. This should include where they will be staying when they leave the hospital, when they may return to work, when they can resume normal daily activities, their new medication schedule, prescriptions which will need to be filled, the specific time frame in which to follow up with their treatment team, and other details important to you and your loved one. The hospitals have social workers who should work with you on this plan to ensure an easy transition out of the hospital. The social workers should also contact the county if your loved one is or will receive county services.
- **Get it in writing** - Before you leave the hospital, get all your discharge instructions in writing. Be sure that these include the names of physicians that you saw, the diagnosis that was made, follow-up instructions, and any prescriptions you may require.
- **Ask about out-of-pocket costs** - Even if you are treated at a hospital approved by your health plan, some hospitals employ doctors (particularly ER physicians, radiologists, and pathologists) who may not participate in your group plan. You may receive a bill for services from these providers as well as bills for television or telephone service.
- **Ask for help** - Many ERs have social workers on staff to help you resolve insurance issues, health plan approvals, and similar situations.

IF THINGS GO WRONG

Not every hospital visit goes smoothly. If you experienced problems during your visit, set up an appointment with the ER or unit director to discuss what went wrong. By explaining your concerns clearly and calmly to the director, you can help the hospital staff be better prepared to treat you next time.