

Emergency Care: What to Expect in the ER

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By Cindy Gill

*Director of Emergency Services
at North Shore Medical Center*

Medical emergencies can be unpredictable and sometimes very traumatic. While no one plans to visit the emergency room of a hospital, it's helpful if you know some things ahead of time. It may even make an unexpected trip at least a little easier.

ERs are equipped to handle most emergencies. Patients usually arrive at the ER by ambulance or by a friend or family member. Sometimes

they may even drive themselves! Patients who arrive by ambulance or are unconscious upon arrival are usually assigned a patient bed immediately. If someone else brings you to the ER and you are not unconscious, you will first be brought to a waiting room, where your medical condition can be assessed.

An emergency room doesn't operate on a first-come, first-served basis; instead patients are seen based on severity of injury or illness. Typical categories may include:

- immediately life-

threatening,

- urgent but not immediately life-threatening, and
- less urgent.

This categorization is usually conducted by a triage nurse and is necessary to ensure that the most severe patients are treated first. The triage nurse is usually the first person you will see in the ER. The nurse will check your vital signs (temperature, pulse, blood pressure, etc.) and will get a brief medical history, including information on current treatments or medications.

Once you see the triage nurse you will usually have to go through registration. This is where you provide details such as your name, address, telephone number and insurance information. If your condition is life-threatening or if you arrive by ambulance, this step may be done later at the bedside.

The waiting times in an emergency room vary from hospital to hospital and day-to-day. If you do have to wait before being seen, remember that the doctors and nurses are busy treating other

patients some of whom may have a life-threatening illness or injury. You may want to bring a book, crossword puzzle or other quiet activity to help you pass the time in the waiting area or for those with non-life threatening conditions; you can hold a place at the ER online, while waiting in the comfort of your own home by using the InQuickER service on the hospitals website www.northshoremhospital.com. There is a fee of \$9.99 to use this service.

Once an emergency

physician is able to see you, you will be brought to an examination room. Some emergency departments break out their examination rooms into various categories, including a trauma center for severely injured patients, a fast track for minor injuries or illnesses and an observation unit for patients who required prolonged treatment or several diagnostic tests.

The emergency physician will ask a lot of questions about the circumstances surrounding the injury or illness. Please turn to ER 19B

Preparing for an unexpected trip to your local emergency room

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illness. To help increase the possibility of correct diagnosis and treatment, you must be sure to be completely truthful about events and symptoms.

you are discharged from the emergency room, you'll be given written instructions on your care at home including instructions on following up with your personal physician.

In addition to being familiar with how the ER works,

Your doctor may need to order laboratory tests, X-rays or other diagnostic tests.

You may need to wait in the emergency room before these special machines are available and while the results are processed and

you should be familiar with a few things before a visit, including:

- The fastest route to your local ER
- Emergency room procedures, including who to check in with and how to check a patient's

analyzed.

You may be admitted to the hospital if your medical condition requires it.

Occasionally, the emergency room physician may decide to put you into a special room for close observation. When

status

- Visiting procedures

Also, keep in mind that ERs can be very busy, with a lot of people – patients, nurses and physicians. Remember to stay calm and to be polite, but assertive.