

Gwinnett Medical Center: Advanced Protocols

Problem to Be Resolved:

- Long throughput times in the ED
- ED Overcrowding

Hospital: Gwinnett Medical Center

Location: 1000 Medical Center Drive
Lawrenceville, GA 30045

Categories:

- Input
- Throughput

Key Words:

- Protocols
- Throughput
- Orders

Hospital Metrics:

(Taken from the FY2005 AHA Annual Survey)

- 2005 ED Volume: 117,013
- Hospital Beds: 479
- Ownership: Not-for-profit
- Trauma level: 2
- Teaching status: No

Tools Provided:

- None

Strategy Description

The hospital created protocols for patients with common complaints so that tests could be started for these patients while they were waiting to see a physician. This strategy uses previously wasted time in the waiting room to reduce the overall ED throughput time for patients.

The Impetus for Change

In fiscal year 2005, Gwinnett Medical Center ED's census was over 100,000 patients while inpatient bed capacity for acute care patients is 175, causing a horrendous mismatch. As a result, inpatients are held in the ED until a bed becomes available. Many methods were considered to reduce the ED throughput time. One of those was to implement **advanced protocols** for the ED's most frequent complaints. Patients tended to have the same tests run when they presented with a certain condition. Typically, when a patient arrived at the ED they would be triaged and then wait to be called back to an ED treatment area. The idea was to start the tests (laboratory and radiology) while the patients waited for a treatment room.

Buy-In and Implementation

When a patient arrives at the ED with a complaint that meets the criteria for a protocol, the staff could immediately begin treatment. Judy Addy Keller, RN, the Emergency Services Service Line Director, says they identified the most common presenting conditions and developed advanced protocols for them. Many of these conditions, such as abdominal pain are typically time consuming in their treatment. Dr. Philip Cannon, the ED Medical Director, developed the advanced protocols. Once he drafted the protocols he distributed them to the ED physicians for their response and input.

When the protocols were finalized, a process was put in place to activate them: the triage nurse or charge nurse sees the patient, determines whether the patient fits a protocol, orders the tests, a technician receives the printed order and starts the necessary tests.

Lessons Learned

Initially some of the emergency medicine physicians were reluctant to use the advanced protocols. Some approved them and some did not. This caused confusion until Dr. Cannon mandated that all ED physicians must use the advanced protocols. It is critical to have complete buy-in or someone with authority must mandate it.

Impact

Ms. Keller says that Gwinnett Medical Center has had an increase in patient satisfaction and they believe their throughput time has decreased. They implemented the protocols in June 2003 and they have been working well since.