

ED News FLASH

> Emergency Department Expansion Campaign <

September 2010

Why Expand the Emergency Department?

By Michael Gerardi, MD, *director of pediatric emergency medicine for Atlantic Health*



Dr. Michael Gerardi

There has never been a more critical time to increase the size and capacity of our Emergency Department (ED) at Morristown Memorial Hospital, which currently sees 80,000 patients per year in a space built for 50,000.

ED visits will increase for the foreseeable future despite the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) of 2010. PPACA will provide health

insurance coverage for an estimated 32 million Americans currently uninsured. If Massachusetts's experience with expanding coverage to the uninsured in 2007 is any predictor of the future, then our ED can expect a 5 to 7 percent increase in volume in the first year alone. Researchers are not sure why the volume increased but they suspect that the security of having health coverage gave people some assurance that they would not be buried by the expenses of health care.

Another cause of increased volumes in EDs has been the closure of close to 1,000 hospitals nationwide in the last 10 years, leaving fewer hospitals to care for over 120 million

patients last year. A phenomenon which tends to shock people is that the steady increase in ED volumes in the last decade has been caused by a disproportionate increase in use of the ED by those with insurance compared to the uninsured. Exacerbating this problem is that patients on Medicaid (combined federal and state health insurance for those with no financial resources) use the ED more than any other patient group and the majority of PPACA insurance coverage will be in the form of Medicaid.

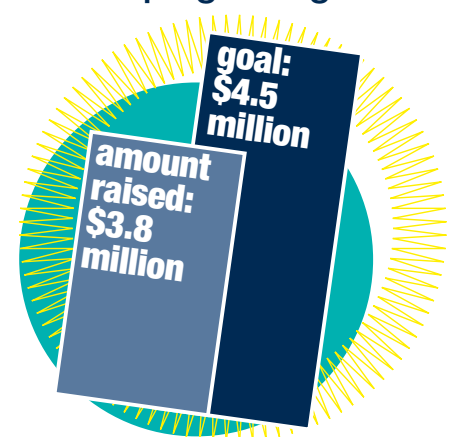
Finally, we expect volumes to stay high and increase because people use the ED prompted by fears that they are seriously ill or because they have significant pain or injuries. The Centers for Disease Control released statistics in August 2010 demonstrating that only 12 percent of Emergency Department visits are non-urgent. This means that nearly 90 percent of patients had symptoms and problems severe and worrisome enough to be seen in the ED. We must expand our ED so that we can continue to provide timely and excellent care.

The Morristown Memorial Health Foundation is in the midst of raising funds for the \$25 million ED expansion. I hope you will join me in supporting this worthwhile campaign.

Did You Know?

1. When the expanded ED is complete, it will be nearly the length of two football fields and house one of the premiere trauma centers in the Tri-State region.
2. The trauma center will feature three large state-of-the-art surgical suites that can be split into six separate operating areas to accommodate a surge in patients.

Campaign Progress



Morristown Memorial
HEALTH FOUNDATION

To support or learn more about this campaign, please call Susan Johns, special gifts officer, at 973-593-2413.

Foundation Grant Assists Psychiatric Patients



Marsha Atkind

As hospitals and psychiatric units across the state continue to close, the number of psychiatric patients seeking treatment at Morristown Memorial's ED is rising rapidly. This influx has increased the time, sometimes by several days, that psychiatric patients wait in the ED for placement, often exacerbating patients' symptoms.

In response, The Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey (HFNJ) provided Morristown Memorial with a \$137,943 grant to implement a support program for psychiatric patients in the ED.

"It's important to care for psychiatric patients quickly in the ED and this program starts a care plan so the patient gets treated right away," says Marsha Atkind, executive director of HFNJ, which is an independent, endowed grant-making organization that works to reduce health care disparities and provide quality health care to vulnerable populations in the greater Newark area and the MetroWest Jewish community.

Through the program, a treatment plan will be developed for psychiatric patients who are in the ED more than six hours or for whom brief treatment is needed. While awaiting transfer, patients will receive psychotherapy and activities therapy. The program aims to stabilize symptoms, provide faster treatment and move psychiatric patients out of the ED more quickly.

The funds will be used to hire a clinician and mental health technicians and to purchase supplies for activities therapy. The grant does not alleviate the nursing shortage (see story below).

Psychiatric Nurse Funding Sought

In the first phase of the ED expansion, the Behavioral Health area gained four new rooms for its patients with three additional rooms available in case of a high patient load. These positive changes, however, have been eclipsed recently, as hospital budget tightening has decreased the availability of floating psychiatric nurses.

"Until recently, four trained psychiatric nurses from another area of the hospital were assisting in the ED and three more were being trained, but the hospital budget can no longer allow it," says Elizabeth McCoy, RN, nurse educator and coordinator of psychiatric care in the ED. Now, ED patients have only one

full-time psychiatric nurse devoted solely to their care. When that nurse isn't available, a general ED nurse takes charge of psychiatric patients.

"ED nurses may be overwhelmed with other patients and psychiatric patients require time; ED nurses don't have a lot of extra time," says Ms. McCoy. "Even if we have only four psychiatric patients, their needs are great. Many are paranoid, frightened and depressed. A lot of time spent waiting can sabotage their condition and make their symptoms worse."

If you're interested in funding additional psychiatric nurses, please contact Susan Johns, special gifts officer, at 973-593-2413.

Irwin Gift Is a Portable Lifesaver

A quick and accurate diagnosis in the ED can mean the difference between a patient's life and death. Thanks to Barbara Irwin of New Vernon, the ED now has one more diagnostic tool – a portable ultrasound machine – to provide fast, high-quality imaging.

In addition to saving lives and contributing to patient safety, the new machine will increase physician efficiency and diagnostic accuracy, says Costas Kaiafas, MD, Emergency Ultrasound Fellowship director. Having ultrasound readily available at the bedside helps diagnose life-threatening conditions because it reveals anatomy previously unseen and enables physicians to confirm whether a procedure is necessary and then perform the procedure more effectively by visually guiding the intervention, he adds.



Dr. Costas Kaiafas shows donor Barbara Irwin the ultrasound in action, with technician Jason Leffler (foreground).