

# How to Establish a Geriatric Emergency Department

Tips from Mark Rosenberg, DO, Chairman of the Department of Emergency Medicine, St. Joseph's Healthcare System, Paterson, NJ

1. Obtain support from hospital leadership.
2. Assess your hospital's needs and determine the patient population you will serve: community-dwelling older adults (aged 65+), nursing home patients, or both.
3. Identify a location for the new unit. If possible, select a place that's quiet and separate from the main ED. But if you don't have extra room, you could still designate four beds in the main ED, for instance, for geriatric patients.
4. Find out if it's financially and logistically feasible to make structural modifications such as adding hand-rails, dimmable lighting, soundproofing, and non-glare flooring.
5. Identify champions within the emergency department who will help run the program – in particular, a nurse who will be the program director and a doctor who will oversee the medical aspects of the unit.
6. Teach everyone who works in the emergency department how to improve care for seniors. Emphasize that it's important to speak with these patients in a respectful way – for example; don't call them by their first name.
7. Create a system for reviewing each patient's prescriptions and identifying potential drug interactions. Dr. Rosenberg's team uses Beers Criteria, a list of medications to avoid prescribing to the elderly.
8. Provide great follow-up care. This will be the key to the success of the program. Every patient should receive a call from a member of your team the day after they leave the ED. If the patient's condition is not improving, they should be asked to return to the ED and prioritized for immediate treatment.