

Posted Wait Times

Problem to Be Resolved:

- High patient volume and long wait times
- Patient satisfaction
- Market perception
- Staff efficiency
- Expense reduction
- Improve patient safety

Hospital: Middlesex Hospital

Location: 28 Crescent Street
Middletown, CT 06457

Contact: Ludwig Johnson
Vice President, Information
Services
lud.johnson@midhosp.org

Category:

- A: Arrival

Key Words:

- Door to Doctor wait time
- Patient volume
- Information system
- Patient centeredness

Hospital Metrics:

(Taken from the American Hospital Directory)

- Annual ED Volume: Approximately 90,000
- Hospital Beds: 275
- Ownership: Non-Profit
- Teaching Status: Yes

Tools Provided:

- Emergency Room Waiting Time Clocks
URL: <http://middlesexertime.com/>
This tool is a single screenshot example of how emergency departments can post the ED wait times on their hospital web page.

Clinical Areas Affected:

- Emergency Department

Staff Involved:

- Hospital Administrators
- Nurses
- Information Services
- Public Relations

Innovation

By sharing with the public information it already had — up-to-the-minute wait times at its three emergency departments — Middlesex Hospital in central Connecticut has substantially increased efficiencies and patient satisfaction and decreased door to doctor times. The wait times are posted on the hospital’s website.

Results

Waiting times at the three EDs — which together see more than 250 patients per day (more than 90,000 per year), making Middlesex the second-largest ED organization in the state — began to level out as patients spread themselves out based on where they could be seen most quickly. A little over a year later, the public’s reliance on the published wait times is evident in the 3,000 views the posts receive each week.

Smoother distribution of patients between EDs “minimizes patients’ wait times and improves their care. The staff can work at a steadier pace all day long, be more efficient and do better work, and they’re less likely to make mistakes.”

Posting ED wait times increased patient satisfaction scores on the Press Ganey scale at all three sites. Marlborough has been at 99% and is the number-one rated ED in the state, Shoreline is rated number two. Patients are empowered by this tool to actually see the doctor in the least amount of time and improving the prospect of a quick and helpful resolution. It has also given Middlesex great PR. Ludwig Johnson, President of Information Services for Middlesex, recalls the surge in media attention the initiative received. The story got picked up by four TV channels as well as newspapers in 26 communities.

From The Experts:

“I determined from the start that the EDs would not post optimistic wait times or even average wait times, but the longest time of any patient in that ED who has not yet seen a physician. The result is that we often beat the posted times. Posting conservative times, gives greater credibility to the EDs and leads to exceeded expectations for patients.”

Michael Saxe, MD, Chairman, Department of Emergency Medicine, Middlesex Hospital

Timeline

In September of 2009 they began posting the waiting times of each ED — updated every five minutes — on the hospital’s website.

Innovation Implementation

Located in Middletown just south of Hartford, the hospital forms a geographic triangle with its two satellite emergency departments at Middlesex Hospital Marlborough Medical Center in Marlborough and Middlesex

Hospital Shoreline Medical Center in Essex. Roughly 50% of the hospitals' patients live within that triangle, which places all three EDs within reasonable driving range of that population. Realizing that distance did not need to be the principal determinant of which ED their patients visited, the Chairman of Middlesex' Department of Emergency Medicine, Michael Saxe, MD, and his colleagues decided to see if they could use some other factor to influence where people sought care — and make patient volume more manageable in the process.

Upon arrival at the ED, each patient is quickly triaged by a nurse who inquires about his or her condition and determines what care will be needed. The nurse then enters this information into the ED information system, at which point the patient's wait time begins to be calculated. The clock stops once a physician is available. That person's wait time is posted, soon to be replaced by the wait time of the next patient.

Saxe explains how patients are triaging themselves in the field by organically spreading themselves out based on where they could be seen most quickly.

Cost/Benefit Analysis

The initiative required little effort and few resources. Saxe explains that the data needed was digitized and available because a comprehensive ED information system with triage and tracking components was already in place. The only thing Middlesex needed to purchase was a program that could read the triage file, determine the ED wait times, and then transfer information to Middlesex's Web server. Wait times are available both in both Flash and HTML formats, which allows users to access information from computers and smartphones. The entire cost associated with posting the times was about \$3,000.

Saxe recommends implementing plans to post ED wait times for any ED that wants to be modern, especially for EDs with information systems already in place — by far the most expensive component of posting Web sites. Middlesex has already implement posting wait times in ED waiting rooms and nurse stations as well. Any upfront technology costs are offset by the time your staff saves not having to answer questions about wait times and the revenue that's not lost by patients leaving without being seen.

Moreover, Saxe says, the fact that 50% of the hospitals' revenue begins with ED visits at the three sites means that being "aware when patients are being inconvenienced and responding to that" makes good business sense.

Advice and Lessons Learned

- 1. Expect some trepidation among staff.** Staff at Middlesex felt that posting these times was going to put the emergency department under the microscope for the community and the administration [to scrutinize], and that they would be held to higher standards and be blamed if they didn't meet our goals. Staff attitudes towards the system are now very accepting, even finding it useful to check the times before coming in to work to gauge how busy it will be.
- 2. Identify good or bad times and evaluate their causes.** Posting wait times creates a greater level of accountability among staff. Saxe explains how knowing the times are available to the public means that everyone in the ED is more aware of them. Administrators can evaluate causes of good or bad times and identify specific resources that may be needed to improve times.

Tools to Download

- [Middlesex Emergency Room Waiting Time Clocks](#)

Related Resources

- [Urgent Matter January/February 2011 E-Newsletter, Volume 8, Issue 1: Best Practices: Improving Patient Satisfaction By Posting Wait Times](#)