



## **Baltimore Washington Medical Center Leads Charge to Change Future of ER Care**

GLEN BURNIE, Md., Nov. 9 /PRNewswire/ -- Baltimore Washington Medical Center has launched an innovative model of care that has changed the face of emergency medicine in the Baltimore Washington corridor. By implementing a new revolutionary care system - InstaCare - wait times are minimized and ambulance diversion hours have almost been eliminated.

The new system reduces delays and streamlines key ancillary processes to create a system in which providers can consistently see patients within minutes of arrival. The bold step shortens wait times, improves patient satisfaction and opens up beds for the sickest of patients.

"Emergency rooms across the country are facing overcrowding and lengthy patient wait times," said Dr. Larry Linder, Senior Vice President, Chief Medical Officer and Chairman of Emergency Medicine at Baltimore Washington Medical Center. "Patients have been dissatisfied with their care for long enough. With InstaCare, we are leading the charge in putting patients first." Baltimore Washington Medical Center's Emergency Room is the largest ER ever to institute InstaCare and only the third one in the country to do so.

In 2003, the Government Accountability Office found three indicators of nationwide ER overcrowding: 1) the number of hours an ER is on ambulance diversion, 2) the proportion of patients and length of time that patients "board" in the ER, and 3) the proportion of patients who leave the ER before receiving a medical evaluation - usually because they are tired of waiting. The InstaCare system has been operational since August, and there is still work to be done.

However, results to date are impressive. Before InstaCare, ambulances at Baltimore Washington Medical Center were diverted up to 155 hours a month, ER wait times ranged between one and four hours and about 3.5 percent of patients left without being seen. During the InstaCare pilot, ambulance diversions dropped to less than 22 hours a month, ER wait times averaged less than 60 minutes and 1 percent of patients left without being seen.

Preliminary patient satisfaction scores also show promise. Overwhelmingly, patients provided positive feedback and gave the highest quality scores to date for emergency room visits. InstaCare is a concept developed by MS2 (Medical Strategies and Management Systems) - an emergency department practice management company based in Providence, Rhode Island - and created by Dr. Emilio S. Belaval. Here's how it works: InstaCare runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The cornerstone of the concept is the Immediate Provider Evaluation (IPE) system. This system allows clinical decisions to happen at the beginning of patient care, decreasing waiting times, lowering turnaround times and facilitating quicker access to physician care.

Under a traditional model of care, patients typically fell into three categories - those with minor or "urgent care" problems, those with serious acute problems such as a stroke or heart attack,

and finally, everyone else. Those patients in the first two categories were generally cared for quickly. But patients who were in the middle often required significant evaluations to determine the reason for their ER visit and the right course of treatment. Often, these were the patients who endured extremely long waits.

"This model of care allows all the patients to have rapid access to diagnostic services and the providers, not just the sickest patients. Treatment for the illness can begin on the spot," Dr. Linder said. "Whether the patient has a sprained ankle or a more serious, life-threatening injury, the model will apply, allowing the patient to receive efficient quality care in a timely manner. Most emergency rooms do their best just to get to their patients when they can. We have moved from that model of eventual care to now care."

The BWMC emergency room has seen tremendous growth in the past six years. In 1999, a new ER opened with the ability to treat 60,000 patients. But in a short time, patient numbers were exceeding capacity. By 2004, the department was treating an average of 219 patients a day - about 80,000 a year. Inevitably, as the patient numbers grew, so did ER wait times.

As is the case with many hospitals today, the medical center is also frequently full. Before InstaCare, patients who needed to be admitted from the ER had nowhere to go. When this happened, the ER also became part intensive care unit, part inpatient unit, meaning even fewer beds were available for ER patients. Patients often sat in the waiting room until an in-house room was available. Medical center leaders knew they needed another solution.

"Each time the emergency room expanded, we saw more patients," said President and CEO James Walker. "Given the projected growth for our area, we knew we had to find an alternate way to improve ER operations and get patients the quality emergency care they need."

To implement InstaCare, MS2 and a multi-disciplinary team of medical center staff, including ER registrars, ER clerical support, lab technicians and radiology staff, completely restructured the ER system, changing everything from the way patients are greeted to the time in which they are treated. Another major change: Instead of registering first, patients now register on their way out the door.

"We're literally putting patients first," said Carol Ann Sperry, director of emergency nursing. Baltimore Washington Medical Center (formerly North Arundel Hospital) is an acute-care facility that is part of the University of Maryland Medical System. It currently has 278 beds and more than 2,400 employees and cares for more than 172,000 patients a year on an inpatient and outpatient basis.

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