

AN EMERGENCY ROOM WIRED FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

ADVANCES HELP HEALTH OUTCOMES IN UNEXPECTED WAYS

New technologies are giving emergency room (ER) staff, patients and caregivers quick, reliable, and secure access to information and care when seconds count.

One place where technology has improved outcomes and efficiency most obviously is in the waiting room. Providers, such as Dignity Health in San Francisco, have begun running commercials encouraging 'non-emergency' patients to make appointments online. Patients with serious emergencies – those with chest pain, persistent bleeding or trouble breathing – are directed to call 911 or go directly to the emergency room. But those with a sprained ankle or a fever can make an appointment. As a result: reduced wait times for everyone, improved time management and more expedient treatment of serious emergencies.

Huntsville Hospital in Alabama has created its own branded medical information app called Med-Info Keeper. It allows healthcare providers "one touch" access to patients' medical history and personal contacts.

"This is a huge advance in being able to provide efficient, accurate, patient-centered care," says ER physician and ThirdAge.com contributor Dr. Monica Williams-Murphy, "You might be unconscious or unable to give information. With one touch on your phone, these emergency providers can know your name, birth date, relevant medical conditions, emergency contacts and possibly your advance directive. How reassuring is that?"

Dr. Williams-Murphy also touts online repositories for advance directives and living wills.

"A living will stored in a safety deposit box is NOT going to help me and your family give you the type of care that you desire if you show up in the emergency department without a copy of it," she says.

Waiting room klosks intrigue Dr. Matt Gratten, ER physician and Chair of Emergency Medicine at the University of Missouri at Kansas City School of Medicine They allow patients to answer preliminary questions and check themselves in.

"A review of symptoms," he calls it, "a snapshot of what's going on with the patient. When you make it in to see the doctor many if the routine questions have been answered and the information is on a computer screen in front of him. There's less wait time and your issues get addressed quickly,"

Dr. Kantil Bansal, an ER physician with Houston-based PhysicianER, has found new vein finders that use infrared technology and ultrasound to be advances that has helped make patients' ER experience more expedient and comfortable. They literally draw a map of the veins," as he describes it, "and we can find a viable vein on the first try. It's especially useful for patients with vein issues caused by diabetes or high cholesterol."

"Often technology starts about 20 before in some lab," says Bansal. "It only really begins to affect people when it's out there and people have access to it. 50, when technology gets to the point where ER's all across the country have it than, as a physician, I can't limagine life without it. No one likes a visit to the ER, so making the experience faster and easier is important."