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Helping Ease the Burden on Healthcare Workers Through Proper Utilization of Healthcare Resources

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IMPROVING HEALTHCARE QUALITY THROUGH PRIMARY CARE

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ABSTRACT

In the current, unprecedented healthcare climate, patients are seeing increased wait times in urgent cares, emergency rooms, and even primary care offices. If a patient does make it through the sometimes four plus hour wait to see a physician in an ER, and they are then admitted to the hospital, they may be stuck waiting for a hospital bed to open up for several more hours in the ER. This vicious cycle of waiting is frustrating for the patients and the healthcare workers. It creates lower quality care, increased adverse outcomes, and improper utilization of resources. In this presentation, I have outlined how, through proper use of the healthcare system, patients can not only improve the quality of their own care, but the care of their community. With resources gathered from Southeast Kansas and Southwest Missouri communities, from free clinics to private practices, members of our community will have the knowledge to choose the healthcare option best suited for their needs. Peer reviewed literature is utilized to evidentiate which healthcare option, primary, urgent, or emergent, would provide the best quality care in any health scenario. When communities are given the proper resources to succeed, it creates better outcomes for all people involved, from patients and their families to the professionals providing the care.

BACKGROUND

In the United States, 30-50% of all Emergency Room visits are considered Non-urgent. The wide range of this statistic is due to the varying definition of “non-urgent” between emergency rooms. Misuse of the ER can create issues for every person involved. The non-urgent patient may face costs as much as seven times higher than if they had seen a family practitioner. The staff of the ER suffers from excessive demand. Overcrowding of patients causes a decrease in timeliness and quality of care. Including walk-in clinics and primary care, nearly one-fourth of all non-urgent healthcare visits are seen by ER physicians, a demographic that makes up only four percent of physicians in the US.

WHY THE ER FOR A NON-EMERGENCY?

Many factors can contribute to a patient choosing to visit the ER including time, access, and financial status. Patients will choose the ER during hours when other services are not open such as their PCP or urgent care. Patients may also choose the ER when they do not have an established PCP or they do not have access to a car, so calling emergency transport services is easier. Finances contribute for those patients who may not be able to pay at the time of services as a PCP generally requires, whereas an ER does not. However, another major contributing factor is the knowledge deficit amongst the public about healthcare options. Patients may not know how to find a PCP or may not even know the difference between a non-urgent and urgent health issue.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NON-URGENT, URGENT, AND EMERGENT COMPLAINTS?

The defining factor between levels of care or levels of acuity is the severity of the health problem. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) defines these levels in terms of time. A non-urgent visit is classified as a medical condition requiring treatment within two to 24 hours. Semi-urgent care is defined as treatment required within 1-2 hours and Urgent care is defined as treatment needed within 15-60 minutes. True Emergent care, by the standard of the CDC, is life-saving medical intervention needed in less than 15 minutes. Unfortunately, these definitions are almost useless to a layperson, or a non-medical person. These definitions are much more easily understood when put into terms of symptoms, such as the differentiating symptoms from the Mayo Clinic.

URGENT CARE:

- Back or muscle pain
- Bronchitis
- Cuts and minor burns
- Diarrhea
- Earache
- Skin conditions
- Sprains or joint pain
- Upper respiratory infection
- Urinary tract infections
- Vomiting

EMERGENT CARE

- Chest pain or pressure
- Protruding Bone
- Head injuries
- Pneumonia
- Seizures
- Severe abdominal pain
- Shortness of breath
- Sudden, severe headache
- Paralysis or weakness
- Uncontrolled bleeding

WHY BOTHER WITH A PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER (PCP)?

Having an established PCP is important for many reasons including as a preventative measure against ER and UC visits. Regular check-ups with an established PCP can identify chronic health issues early, create long-term treatment plans, and provide education on a healthier lifestyle. PCPs provide preventive care and can provide referrals to specialists when needed. Having an established relationship with a primary care physician creates higher quality care for the patient through continuity and trust. ER and UC physicians cannot provide follow-up care. When a patient is given a new medication for a new issue from the ER, they cannot just go back to the ER for a refill without going through the entire process again. A PCP provides long-term health management, again working to prevent unnecessary visits to the ER and UC.

WHERE COULD SOMEONE IN SOUTHEAST KANSAS OR SOUTHWEST MISSOURI FIND A PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER?

There are many options in SEK and SWM for primary care from private clinics to large physician groups associated with hospitals. Below are the phone numbers for the largest primary care providing agencies in the area.

- **COMMUNITY HEALTH CLINIC OF SEK: 620-231-9873**
 - **ASCENSION VIA CHRISTI: 620-231-6100**
 - **GIRARD MEDICAL CENTER: 620-724-8291**
 - **ACCESS FAMILY CARE: 417-451-9450**
 - **FREEMAN HEALTH SYSTEMS: 417-347-3767**
 - **MERCY FAMILY MEDICINE: 417-556-3400**

WHAT TO SAY WHEN CALLING TO ESTABLISH CARE

Hello! My name is {instert patient name here} I am looking to establish care with a primary care provider near {insert patient location here}.

CONCLUSION

Through the resources outlined above, including primary care providers in the community and how to differentiate between non-urgent and urgent complaints, a patient should be able to make the best choice for their healthcare needs. When patients choose the healthcare option best suited to their needs, the entire community benefits. Proper utilization of healthcare resources can improve the quality and timeliness of the care received, helping the patient heal and easing the burden on healthcare providers.

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