



## Perfecting Patient Flow

The PA Hospital Capacity Enhancement Initiative

February 2008

### **PinnacleHealth System: Express Admission Unit, Throughput Management Help Fulfill Mission**

PinnacleHealth hospitals are dedicated to maintaining and improving the health and quality of life for all people in its service area. The system's Harrisburg Hospital emergency department was faced with a growing number of patients who would leave without being seen and experienced longer wait times, as well as increasing numbers of patients (due to a policy change to not divert ambulances). When patients leave before being treated, there's no way a hospital can fulfill its mission. Therefore, the system saw an opportunity to further its mission by decreasing the number of patients leaving without being seen, increasing patient satisfaction, and delivering high-quality safe care.

After a review of the basic emergency area and retrospective modeling, an "express admission unit" was developed. The unit is managed and staffed by float pool personnel. It is a self-contained and secluded area and acts as a holding area for admitted patients, cycling them out of the emergency department more quickly.

In addition, throughput management was implemented. Through 24/7 accountability and analysis of departmental flow of patients, the hospital hoped to decrease and ultimately eliminate patients who leave without

being seen. These patients are individuals who are triaged and registered into the system, but leave the waiting room or department before being seen by a physician or mid-level provider.

The hospital monitors lengths of stay for both admitted and discharged patients. When a patient gets closer to a set target time (allowing for the evaluation and diagnostic testing phase), the throughput manager takes an objective look and starts asking what may be impeding the flow of determining a disposition for the specific patient. This may entail a quick call to the charge nurse, helping to obtain a result for a practitioner, or conferring with the clinical supervisor to make sure they are aware of the patients that are potential or actual admissions.

#### ***The Results***

After implementation of the express admission unit, the hospital saw a decrease of nearly 12 percent in the number of triage level 1 to 3 patients who were leaving without being seen. The system-wide efforts and commitment have led to Emergency Services being able to accomplish many positive results. "We continue to get closer to our departmental and system operational goals. We have learned

that the more we pay attention to the issues surrounding throughput and leave without being seen patients, the better we can effect change," says Eugene O'Donnell, emergency department throughput manager. It was O'Donnell who facilitated a change in thinking, moving the organization to a culture where what once was viewed as a "department" problem is now approached with a system-wide response.

The hospital found several keys to success, including being present to assist with moving a patient or helping the charge nurse in placing incoming patients and helping educate all staff about the throughput manager's role (as it relates to organizational goals for Emergency Services).

#### **Plan to Attend!**

**Mark your calendars and plan now to attend the 2008 Capacity Management Summit, June 2 and 3 at the Holiday Inn Harrisburg-Hershey.**

**Program details and registration information will be available soon!**