



MEMO

DATE: July 5, 2011

SUBJECT: Emergency Department Overcrowding

TO: Hospital CEOs and Governing Board Members

FROM: Eli Avila, MD, JD, MPH, FCLM
Secretary of Health

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Eli N. Avila'.

Emergency Department overcrowding is a serious barrier to quality health care provided to the residents of this Commonwealth. Overcrowding affects the hospital as a whole, not just the Emergency Department.

In 2008, in response to concerns raised by the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians (PA ACEP), the Department of Health (the Department) collaborated with PA ACEP to develop a project to facilitate the admission of patients held in the Emergency Department awaiting inpatient bed assignment. The hypothesis was that providing approved, alternate locations within the hospital for patients that required admission could assist in alleviating the lack of available beds in the emergency department. Five facilities (one with a dual location) were approved for inclusion in the pilot.

To date, the minimal monthly data collected from the facilities participating in this pilot indicate the alternate locations are not utilized consistently. The Department continues to receive reports of hall beds used in the Emergency Department in an effort to manage the patient census from facilities across the state. From December 1, 2010 to May 31, 2011, the Department received 857 reports of the use of ED hallway space used for beds.

28 PA Code § 103.4 requires the Governing Body of a facility to

1. Provide appropriate physical resources and personnel required to meet the needs of the patients and participate in planning to meet the health needs of the patients and health needs of the community.
2. A quality control mechanism should be established which includes as an integral part thereof a risk management component and an infection control program.
3. Formulate short-range and long-range plans for the development of the hospital.
4. Provide for the control and use of the physical and financial resources of the hospital.

Simultaneously, the regulations list the responsibilities of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) (28 PA Code §: 103.33) which includes “management of the hospital, commensurate with the authority conferred on him by the governing body and consonant with its expressed arms and policies.”

It is strongly recommended that the CEO and Governing Board of each facility gather and analyze emergency department utilization data, as well as reviewing any patient through processes currently used, in whatever quality assurance/performance improvement process utilized in your facility, in an ongoing effort to adequately address emergency department overcrowding specific to your facility (ies).

The use of hallway beds in Emergency Departments will be one focus of the Department through the Department’s ongoing survey processes.