

Pennsylvania Medical Society  
400 Winding Creek Blvd.  
Mechanicsburg, PA 17050

August 9, 2023

Governor Josh Shapiro  
508 Main Capitol Building  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Subject: Emergency Department Overcrowding

Dear Governor Shapiro,

The undersigned partners ask for your assistance and partnership in addressing a dire situation facing both rural and metropolitan communities across the Commonwealth – **Emergency Department overcrowding**. The American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) defines overcrowding as "...a situation that occurs when the identified need for emergency services exceeds available resources for patient care in ED, hospital, or both."

**The primary cause of overcrowding is boarding:** the practice of holding patients in the emergency department after they have been admitted to the hospital, because no inpatient beds are available.

The American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) believes a "boarded patient" is defined as a patient who remains in the emergency department after the patient has been admitted or placed into observation status at the facility but has not been transferred to an inpatient or observation unit.

In a recent survey in which nearly 60% of the 106 Association of Academic Chairs of Emergency Medicine (AACEM) academic department members responded, 83% indicated that boarding was worse, with one-third of all respondents reporting it "much worse" than pre-Covid-19 levels.

ACEP collected more than 140 personal stories from emergency physicians across the country. 97% cited boarding times of more than 24 hours, with one-third stating they had patients stay more than one week, and 28% citing they had patients boarding more than 2 weeks.

This problem is multifaceted, negatively affecting the healthcare system, patients, and the community. One of our members likened the problem to a clogged kitchen sink. While a sink full of water is the result of clogged pipes, the sink isn't the cause of the problem. To address the cause of the kitchen sink that is overflowing with water, you'd likely take a look at what is clogging the pipes. Much in the same fashion, there are a variety of issues "clogging the pipes" of the emergency department so to speak. A variety of institutional input, throughput, and output issues are the culprit. Some of the main issues include;

- Health care providers are challenged to work with less staffed inpatient beds as well as ongoing critical staff shortages including bedside nurses
- Transport challenges for patients being discharged or transferred to other facilities from their inpatient stay or their Emergency Department visit
- The ED is operating 7 days week/24 hour/ day, but the health care community (including but not limited to specialists/testing needed for safe discharge/behavioral health) is not

The breadth of this issue is daunting - an issue that has taken decades to develop, only to be exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. A statewide approach is essential to addressing the root causes of ED Overcrowding to ensure Pennsylvania citizens have better access to care, lower mortality rates and increased quality of care across the Commonwealth. For this reason, we reach out to you as a partner, **asking for the immediate creation of a Governor's Task Force gathering the many voices of medicine focused on ED Overcrowding.**

Sincerely



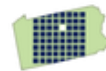
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