Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center's Innovative Effort to Reduce Turnaround Time to Admission

By James Kim, MD
ED Medical Director
Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center

Between 2006 and 2010, Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center saw our emergency department (ED) volume rise 30% to a total of 79,900 patients. Serving one of the fastest growing communities in Los Angeles County, our Director of Emergency Services, Yvonne Nugent, RN, BS, TNCC, CEN, expects patient volume to hit 90,000 by the end of 2011.

The steady rise in volume began to overwhelm our 46-bed ED. Although we worked towards reducing our time to provider (TTP) by implementing CEP America's Rapid Medical Evaluation (RME)® process, the ED staff was having difficulty discharging patients in a timely manner. We were experiencing high levels of overcrowding and the number of patients waiting to be moved out of the ED – either to be discharged or admitted to another department of the hospital – was so great that it was resulting in extraordinarily long turnaround times and jeopardizing the safety of all patients in the ED.

"At times, the ED was drowning and the rest of the hospital didn't know it," recalls Vice President of Nursing & Patient Care Services, Darlene Scaffidi, RN, MSN. "We knew we had more resources and we could help the ED if only we knew; we just had to find the mechanism."

We turned to our partner, CEP America, to identify existing processes both internally and at other EDs across the country that could be used to alleviate the situation.

Drawing on their experience with dozens of other EDs, CEP America identified best practices and helped us to develop the "Capacity Alert Response" system. Utilizing our already-existing hospital alert system, the Capacity Alert Response established a multi-tiered system to alert all hospital departments that the ED was facing serious overcrowding.

The Capacity Alert Response system begins with an internal alert to all members of the ED staff when attempts to discharge or admit patients have come to a standstill. The staff mobilizes and accounts for all patients, working to discharge as many as possible. If the ED is still overcrowded, we make the decision to send out a hospital-wide "Code Bed" alert. Within ten minutes, representatives from all departments in the hospital – from hospitalists to facilities – must report to the ED and examine the situation. Hospital resources are assessed and those patients that can be admitted to other departments are relocated out of the ED.

Implementation of the Capacity Alert Response system was not a quick or easy process; it took several years and ongoing refinements for the system to operate consistently and successfully. But now, all of the hospital staff recognizes that moving patients out of the ED quicker provides a safe and more efficient site of care for patients.

Following the implementation of the Capacity Alert Response system, Pomona Valley's ED has seen its turnaround-time to discharge (TAT-D) drop over 10% in six months. We also managed to improve front-end operations, with a TTP that went from over an hour to around twenty-one minutes – a noteworthy improvement for a site whose volume has so far increased 8.4% between 2010 and 2011.

There has also been a noticeable rise in our patient satisfaction scores. "Our customer service has been impacted quite a bit!" Yvonne Nugent reports. "We managed to bring our patient satisfaction scores from a very low 3.2, to a rating of almost 4. And it's resulted in wonderful comments from our patients."

James Kim, MD, is the Emergency Department Medical Director at Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center. He graduated from the Loma Linda University School of Medicine, going on to complete his residency in emergency medicine at the University's Medical Center. In addition to serving as Pomona Valley's ED Medical Director, Dr. Kim is the Chairman of both the Pneumonia Quality Care Committee and Department of Emergency Medicine. He has been a Partner with CEP America since 2003.