

# PATIENT SAFETY BLOG

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## **ER delays cause patients to skip care**

Delays in the emergency room cause some patients to forgo treatment, according to a study by the University of South Florida. The study found that when ER patients have to wait to be admitted to hospital, the waiting time for other ER patients becomes longer, and the more likely it is that some of them will leave the ER and not get the treatment they need.

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The problem is referred to as “boarding.” About 30% of ER patients need to be admitted to the hospital for further treatment, but often, they have to wait for inpatient beds to become free. As a result, waiting times for others in the ER increase.

The intent of the study, which monitored the ER at the USF-affiliated Tampa General Hospital, was to determine the number of ER patients that might walk out in frustration. The study determined that the longer those patients wait to be admitted, the more likely it is that other patients waiting behind them will leave the ER.

The research results have already been used to improve patient flow at TGH, which has implemented changes to the way patients are treated and admitted. However, study co-author David Wein, MD, says similar problems to those documented at TGH occur at hospitals across the country.

In 2007, almost 117 million people went to American hospital emergency rooms for medical attention, according to the National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey. In 2008, the number of visits increased to over 123 million.

Wein notes that the increased demand on emergency departments will be a problem if delays getting patients out of already busy emergency departments are not addressed.

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