



What is Emergency Room "Triage"?



Overview

When you arrive at the ER, the hospital staff needs to quickly figure out how sick or hurt you are. They need to know if you have a life-threatening medical problem and if you need a doctor immediately. They do this with a process called "triage." Let's take a moment to learn more about it.

A French word

The word "triage" is French. It means "to sort." During triage, the ER staff sorts patients by how serious their medical problems are. For example, a patient having a heart attack usually needs to be seen more quickly than a person who has a sprained wrist. Triage helps the doctors decide the order to see all the patients.

Checking your vitals

Who does triage? Often, you'll see a nurse for this. You may see them right in the waiting room, or they may take you to a different area. The nurse checks your vital signs. This includes your temperature, pulse, blood pressure and breathing rate. They ask you about the reason for your visit, and give you a quick exam.

Conclusion

After triage, the staff will see you as quickly as they can. You may be sent to see a doctor right away. Or, you may need to sit in the waiting area for a while. If there are a lot of patients that day, you may need to wait longer than you expect. Remember, patients at the ER are not seen in the order they arrive. They're seen in the order they need treatment. So when you're a patient, it helps to be patient.