

ER wait times continue to rise; increases risk of misdiagnosis

According to the most recent data, wait times for emergency rooms across the U.S. are on the rise. A new study points to an interesting reason behind the increase-and the potential danger it poses to patients.

ER wait times around the nation

Wait times for emergency room departments have increased in the last several years, although they vary within states. The average wait time today for an ER visit in Kings County Hospital in New York is 113 minutes. In Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the average wait time for an ER visit at Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center is about 53 minutes. At Baptist Medical Center in Jackson, Mississippi, the average ER wait time is 96 minutes.

And the list goes on and on.

Dental problems

A new study conducted by the Florida Public Health Institute indicates that the reason may be attributed to an increase in patients seeking treatment for dental issues. The data showed that in 2012, almost 140,000 Florida residents went to the ER for treatment that related to tooth problems such as oral sores and cavities. This was a 6.4 percent increase from 2011.

And this is just in the state of Florida. According to data from the National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey, more than two million people all across the country visited the ER for dental problems in 2010.

But why does this pose a danger to patients?

Danger associated with higher patient volumes

Higher wait times for doctors' visits in the ER or elsewhere are cause for alarm because many doctors often cut corners and spend very little time with patients to get through the influx of those waiting to be seen.

According to a recent report from CNN, the average time a family practitioner spends with a patient today has "dwindled to a speedy seven minutes" and even less for urgent care or

emergency room patients.

Sadly, this failure to spend adequate time to assess a patient's condition often results in misdiagnosis. An emergency room doctor may, for instance, simply prescribe an antibiotic for a suspected infection when the patient is actually suffering from a heart attack. Research reveals that heart attack misdiagnosis is one of the top conditions often missed by health care personnel.

Duty of care

Physicians, nurses and other medical professionals have a duty of care to the patients they treat. A failure to misdiagnose a condition can fall below that standard of care. Those who have suffered injury or illness as a result of an [emergency room misdiagnosis](#) could have a cause of action for medical malpractice.