



# Fort Carson-MEDDAC News

## Emergency Room, Urgent Care or Primary Care? Do you know when to use each of these?

By: Rebecca Short and Caron Wilbur, MEDDAC Registered Nurses

At some time in our lives we have all been there. It's late at night or a weekend and you or a family member is sick. There are choices to consider. Go to the emergency room or wait to see your primary care provider? Which one provides the most appropriate care for the situation?

### **Your choice matters**

In February, 631 Soldiers, retirees and family members went to emergency departments in our area. Of those, only 45 were admitted with serious injury or illness. The majority were simply seeking non-emergency medical care. Over the past year, enrollees to Evans Army Community hospital have made almost 52,000 trips to off-post community emergency rooms at a cost of more than \$3.8 million. More than half of those visits were for non-emergent care. Not only is that money that could have been used to offer you additional health care services at Evans, it also means each of those people didn't get to see a provider who is familiar with their medical history.

### **Primary Care**

As a TRICARE beneficiary enrolled to a military treatment facility, your primary place to receive health care is your Family Medicine Clinic with your assigned primary care manager. Operating on the patient centered medical home model, our system of making appointments and seeing your primary care provider has never been faster or more efficient than it is today. You need only call one number, 719- 526-CARE (2273), provide some basic information and receive the next available appointment.

There are several advantages to seeing your primary care provider. In addition to getting quality medical care, your provider knows your history and your conditions. Your care is documented in your medical record, which is important when you move to other locations, as you ETS or retire for evaluation of VA benefits when you retire. Finally, your provider focuses on your long-term health, is able to assess and treat current symptoms, and monitors chronic conditions to help you live a full life.

### **Emergency Care**

Emergency care is for sudden, unexpected medical conditions that, in the judgment of a clear-thinking adult with an average knowledge of health, would endanger or seriously harm a person's life or health if not treated immediately by a licensed medical professional.



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An emergency is an immediate threat to loss of life, limb, or eye sight. In a life-threatening emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency care facility. You may go to any hospital in your area for emergency care.

Remember that all patients arriving at the emergency room are triaged. This is a constant assessment to determine who needs care now, and who can wait. If you or your family member does not have a real emergency, you can spend hours waiting as you watch an almost endless parade of others receive care before you.

The emergency room staff has highly skilled and dedicated people, but they are trained to save lives and limbs and to stabilize their patients. It's important to understand that they are not your long term care providers and don't have the bigger picture and history of your health care.

## **Urgent Care**

If you have an urgent, non-life-threatening medical problem, our clinics now offer extended hours and nurses are available to answer questions. A provider is on call and available 24 hours for advice if you call the Access to Care line at 526-2273. Heading to a non-military emergency room or urgent care center before getting an authorization could result in point-of-service charges. That means you may have to pay up to 50 percent of the bill.

## **Choose wisely**

It's important to evaluate your condition and make the most appropriate choice. Knowing and understanding the differences between a real medical emergency and just being sick has consequences. Help us improve the quality of your long term care by seeing your primary provider. We want to foster a lifetime of wellness!