

CARING FOR OUR PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE



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My dad was once left unattended in an ED treatment space on a stretcher with the side rails down. This situation is concerning in and of itself, but when considering his chief complaint—an aura that predicted he was going to have a seizure—it is clear that leaving him in that condition was quite simply poor judgment. About a year prior to this day, he had experienced a posterior hemisphere intracerebral hemorrhage. After his recovery and rehabilitation, an aura appeared prior to the occurrence of a complex tonic-clonic seizure. None of us is surprised that when the staff returned to his treatment space, he was found face down on the floor after having had a seizure. My dad was flown to a tertiary care center with a frontal contusion; he again went through rehabilitation, and eventually he nearly returned to his baseline. I do not share this scenario to evoke anger or sympathy but to remind each of us that we must always be hypervigilant when we are responsible for the care of others. We are our patients' first line of defense.

Caring for our past, present, and future is what we do every day in emergency departments around the globe. Recognizing the great care provided by each of you is important, and to meet the needs of our patients, the majority of emergency departments need to be prepared to care for patients across the life span. Care of the older adult is about our past, and for many of us, it will be our present in just a few years. Our future is focused on our pediatric patients.

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Although it may not seem logical to discuss caring for our past first, this approach makes sense because the older population is increasing, along with ED visits for patients older than 65 years. It is incumbent on us to understand the different pathophysiology, clinical needs, and psychological support that our geriatric patients require.

Significant work is being undertaken in many emergency departments around the issue of geriatric readiness. Is your emergency department “geriatric friendly”? Do you have an elder care navigator? Have you considered the difficulty that many of our older patients experience in even getting on or off a care surface? Geriatric ED certification addresses the physical environment, resources required, education, and training that nurses and providers need to be geriatric ready. The ENA Geriatric Emergency Nurse Education¹ course is a robust online educational program that provides the educational content needed for nurses in emergency departments who are considering geriatric ED accreditation.²

Caring for our pediatric population can be challenging. Their physiologic needs are often age- or chronic care-dependent, and their developmental stage may not be congruent with age or body size. I am passionate about the patients who represent our future and believe every emergency department should be “pediatric ready.” An ENA Position Statement that is being developed, “The Role of the Emergency Nurse in Pediatric Readiness,”³ highlights the importance of every emergency nurse and emergency department being prepared to care for children at all times. This proposed statement is supported by the joint policy statement from ENA, the American College of Emergency Physicians, and the American Academy of Pediatrics, “Pediatric Readiness in the Emergency Department,” which provides guidelines for emergency departments on being “pediatric ready.”⁴ Every emergency department that provides care for children should ensure that they meet the guidelines set forth in these documents. As emergency nurses, we want to be ready for whatever comes through our doors. This readiness is most important when the patients are children who represent our future.

Caring for the young and the old is about our present. Each day we encounter new and unusual care decisions. We are proud to care for those who need us, often on what will be the worst day of their lives. Keeping safety and preparedness as our mantra will help us ensure that our patients receive the best possible outcome. We are committed to care.

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