GUEST VIEW: Emergency rooms are a constant

By **Dr. Sudip Bose,** August 2, 2020

Over the past several months, COVID-19 has become a central focus in all of our lives. We anxiously await the news each evening with hopes that the numbers of cases and hospitalizations are decreasing. However, here in Ector County, just last week, hospital officials for both Medical Center Hospital and Odessa Regional Medical Center noted increases in their COVID units as the numbers trend up for hospitalizations. And unfortunately, as cases continue to surge in the wrong direction, we must make take certain precautions to protect against the spread of the virus. As we work together to flatten the curve, it seems the virus is affecting every decision we make.

But there is a bit of an untold story here, one that we, emergency healthcare providers, have been watching unfold over the past several weeks. It's a situation that everyone must be aware of.
While I'm proud to report that our community has worked together to wear masks, social distance and stay home, people have also inadvertently stopped getting critical emergency health care. In fact, a recent national survey

found nearly half of Americans have delayed medical care because of COVID-19 and 11 percent of those who delayed care saw worsened health conditions as a result. Similarly, emergency room volumes across the country decreased 21% in June 2020 compared to June 2019, which is better than April and May, when volumes were down 48% and 42% compared to levels a year earlier. Here in Odessa, we have seen a similar trend of emergency room visits and EMS requests decreasing significantly. As a result, people are literally dying at home simply because they are afraid to go to an emergency room.

In many cases, these consequences are entirely avoidable with proper, timely medical care. For example, if not addressed immediately, a treatable heart attack can turn into lifelong heart disease, or worse, death. Following the initial COVID-19 outbreak, New York City reported an 800 percent increase in at-home deaths due to fear of contracting the virus in hospitals. The thought of loss of life is troubling enough – imagine knowing that loss could have been prevented with a short drive to the emergency room.

The most common and life-threatening delays in care are from patients with heart disease, stroke and sepsis. Any delay in seeking care for these conditions places the patient's life at risk and can have massive ramifications for their future health. Stroke victims in particular have shown a dangerous trend of delaying care during the pandemic. New research shows patients are arriving to hospitals and treatment centers an average of 160 minutes later during COVID-19. When every second counts, this is a matter of life and death.

COVID-19 may have changed daily lives in many ways, but emergency rooms have stood, and remain, a constant pillar for communities to rely on. With patient safety always the top priority, emergency care providers are going above and beyond in new health protocols. Just some of the steps being taken include: rigorous sanitation protocols; stringent screening processes; mobile units for patient care and procedures; and separate areas for those suspected of having COVID-19. Nothing is more important than protecting patients' lives. Emergency medicine physicians will continue to go the extra mile, taking every precaution possible to ensure a safe, reliable space for every patient who needs it.

Let me be clear: there is absolutely no reason to delay care under any circumstances. If you are experiencing chest pain, shortness of breath, weakness, tingling or blurred vision – or any other symptom you feel is an emergency, please seek immediate care.

A health emergency is just that, an emergency. It requires urgent, specialized care and there should be no question, hesitation or delay in getting that care. As much as we work together to battle the pandemic, we must also work together to ensure proper health care is not neglected.
We all want to be safe and do what is necessary to keep our fellow community members safe. However, that does not mean putting your life or a loved one's life at risk. You must trust we are here to provide the right care at the right time at the right place 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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https://www.oaoa.com/editorial/columns/guest_columns/guest-view-emergency-rooms-are-a-constant/article_82fc5eba-d415-11ea-949e-a7aabb88fd5d.html