



4 Key Ways Primary Care and Community Physicians Can Help Reduce Unnecessary ER Visits

Inappropriate emergency room use isn't just a problem for hospitals and emergency room physicians. It benefits all of us—physicians, hospitals, and patients—to reduce these preventable emergency room visits. Not to mention the benefit for the state budget.

Physicians and hospitals must show they can effectively reduce the number of preventable emergency room visits by Medicaid patients by January 15, 2013. If we fail to do so, the state will move forward with their original proposal not to cover any "unnecessary" ED visits, which will result in \$38 million in cuts for physicians and hospitals. All physicians have a role to play in making this effort a success. Specifically, primary care and community physicians as well as specialty physicians can:

1. Make room in your schedule to accommodate Medicaid patients who are re-directed to the outpatient setting for care. Lack of access to care is a major contributing factor for unnecessary emergency room use. The alternative plan specifies Medicaid patients must be seen within 72 hours of their visit to the emergency room.
2. Educate your patients on choosing the appropriate place for care. A brochure for patients, *A Guide to Help You Choose the Best Place to Go for Health Care* is available in hard copy or [online](#).
3. Participate in the [Prescription Monitoring Program](#) (PMP) to track the prescribing of controlled substances to patients. The statewide program coordinates data from pharmacies and physicians to track what controlled substances patients are having filled, where, and by whom. Patients seeking narcotics are part of the problem of unnecessary emergency room use.
4. Be aware of the [Narcotics Guidelines](#) [PDF] that attempt to standardize narcotics prescribing in the emergency room. Patients will no longer be able to get narcotics prescribed in the emergency room. This allows you to have more control over the medications your patients are prescribed.

Additional information—including video presentations on these issues—can be found on the websites of the Washington State Medical Association ([WSMA](#)), Washington State Hospital Association ([WSHA](#)), and the Washington Chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians ([WA-ACEP](#)).