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## Who's who in the emergency department

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### Summary

- If you have a medical emergency or are in an accident and an ambulance is called, paramedics are the people who care for you and they may take you to the emergency department.
  - A triage nurse sees you when you first arrive at the emergency department to work out how serious your illness or injury, provide first aid and prioritise your care.
  - Emergency physicians are doctors who specialise in emergency diagnosis and care.
  - You may need to have some medical tests to work out what is wrong with you and the best treatment for you.
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If you arrive at a hospital emergency department by ambulance, the staff members in the ambulance are paramedics who will attend to you on site and on your journey.

Care in hospital emergency departments is provided by highly trained staff, the most senior being emergency physicians led by the Director of Emergency Medicine.

A nurse manager (or charge nurse) leads a team of highly trained nurses.

You may also have contact with allied health professionals, such as radiographers, physiotherapists or social workers. There are also administrative and support staff.

### Ambulance paramedics

If you have a medical emergency or serious accident, paramedics are the medical team who arrive by ambulance to assess your medical condition and treat you before taking you to hospital. They manage your treatment on the way to hospital until you are in the care of the emergency department.

Paramedics may:

- provide advanced life support
- perform clinical procedures
- administer drugs
- decide which hospital or medical facility is the most appropriate for their patient.

### Healthcare staff in the emergency department

When you first arrive at the emergency department, a triage nurse (a specialist emergency department nurse) will assess how sick or injured you are. You will then be seen by an appropriate healthcare professional – this may be a doctor, a nurse practitioner, an allied health professional or a mental health worker, depending on your problem. How quickly this happens will depend on how busy the emergency department is and how urgently you need treatment.

The medical staff who may treat you in the emergency department include:

- emergency physicians (very senior specialist doctors, also known as consultants)
- registrars (senior doctors working towards becoming specialists)
- hospital medical officers (doctors working in the emergency department, not training to be specialists)
- interns (doctors in their first year of practice).

You may also see other specialists and healthcare professionals who can help with your treatment, such as:

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- nurse practitioners (very senior specialist nurses who can assess and treat selected conditions)
- allied health professionals, such as physiotherapists, occupational therapists and emergency department pharmacists
- the mental health emergency care team, who can conduct mental health assessments
- care coordinators, who work with hospital staff, general practitioners and other professionals, to make sure you receive high-quality treatment and care when you return home.

### **Diagnostic staff in the emergency department**

As part of your diagnosis and treatment, you may be sent for tests such as x-rays or scans. Technicians, such as radiographers or sonographers, and radiologists (consultant doctors qualified to interpret imaging tests) work with emergency department staff to help diagnose and treat your medical problem.

They may use a range of diagnostic imaging techniques such as:

- x-ray
- computerised tomography (CT) scan
- magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan
- ultrasound
- nuclear medicine.

You may also need blood tests while you are in the emergency department. These are sent to the pathology service where specialist laboratory staff do the blood tests and then send back to specialist doctors for review.

### **Support staff in the emergency department**

Support staff in the emergency department may include:

- administrative staff, who make sure that your personal details are correct and manage other administrative processes related to your emergency department visit
- orderlies and environmental services staff, who move you between areas, keep the emergency department clean and help with meals
- security staff, who help keep the emergency department safe and secure.

### **Staff who may help with your emergency department discharge**

If you don't need to be admitted to hospital after your treatment in the emergency department and are discharged directly from there, you will be provided with advice and a discharge plan if necessary. This plan gives instructions for your recovery and outlines any ongoing services you may need. You may also be given other information about your condition, such as a fact sheet.

Any prescriptions the doctor has given you will need to be filled by a pharmacist. The emergency department staff will explain how to do this and where you can find a pharmacist.

### **Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- Your nurse
- Hospital staff
- Clinical care coordinator
- Hospital social worker

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Department of Health and Human Services

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