

The Sad State Of The U.S. Emergency Care System

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This column will appear in the upcoming March print issue of Surgical Products.



There are times when the results of an evaluation are difficult to interpret. There are other times when an assessment does not allow for any legitimate conclusions to be reached or opinions to be formed.

However, the results of a recent evaluation of the nation's emergency care system leave little room for debate. Furthermore, they raise significant questions about what Americans in need of immediate medical attention can expect when seeking care.

In its most recent "report card," the American College of Emergency Physicians say the nation's emergency care system earned a grade of "D+." To make matters worse, the latest mark is down from the "C-" the group gave it in its last report in 2009.

The report evaluates five categories: access to care, quality and patient safety, liability, injury prevention, and disaster preparedness. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services also factored into the grades. The highest mark given to an individual state was a "B-" assessed to Washington D.C. Wyoming, on the other hand, was the lone state to receive a failing grade.

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While it should be noted that the report does not serve as an actual measurement of the quality of care, it does indicate how providers feel about national and state policies that affect that care.

The report shed light on concerns about lengthy patient wait times, shortages, reduced hospital capacity, and disaster preparedness. The low overall grade handed out by the American College of Emergency Physicians suggests there is little doubt that providers feel strongly about those concerns, that they are warranted, and that something must be done to address them. There's really no other way to interpret such a poor grade.

Furthermore, it's impossible not to wonder how the recent implementation of the Affordable Care Act will affect the nation's emergency health system. There is every reason to believe the demand for healthcare will only rise with the increased availability of insurance coverage. How will that affect the myriad concerns about the nation's emergency care system that were raised in this report?

In the five years between reports, the American College of Emergency Physicians' opinion on that system became less favorable with time. Now that the United States is firmly entrenched in the era of the Affordable Care Act, is it even the slightest bit reasonable to expect their feelings about national and state policies that affect this system to improve in the future? I'm quite afraid the answer to that question is "No."

What's your take? E-mail me at mike.schmidt@advantagemedia.com [1] or respond on Twitter @MikeSchmidt_SP.

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*** There will be no Friday Four this week. However, look for it to return next Friday. Thanks for reading!*

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