

What You Can Learn from a Tragic Death in an ER Waiting Room

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After Joaquin Rivera experienced chest pain and checked in to the emergency room at Aria Health's Frankford Hospital in Philadelphia he took a seat in the waiting room. It would be his final resting place. Not only did the 63-year old guidance counselor die of a heart attack while waiting for nurse to triage him and a doctor to examine him, his body wasn't discovered for forty minutes. He sat slumped in his chair surrounded by several other patients while a nurse called his name twice. A security guard failed to notice him during his shift watching over the room. To add insult to the already tragic situation, two homeless drug addicts stole Rivera's watch from his expired body.

At a hearing yesterday in Philadelphia City Hall the hospital's chief operating officer stated the obvious, according to this report in the Philadelphia Inquirer: the patient died needlessly as a result of incompetence on the part of hospital staff.

A couple of lessons from the situation:

*Patronize good and busy hospitals. HealthGrades does not even rank Frankford Hospital because its volume of heart attacks is too low. If possible go to a five-star hospital.

*Patients get treated faster when they come by ambulance. Consider calling an ambulance even if you can get a ride or transport yourself.

*There's no such thing as minor chest pain. Don't ever let a hospital admissions clerk make you wait in line. "When you go to the emergency room, it's not like going to a bakery. If you have a left-side pain, you need to be evaluated immediately," Rivera's lawyer Tom Kline told the paper.

*Leave your valuables at home. Hospitals are not only dangerous places because of all the infectious diseases, medical errors and out-of-control billing--they are also sometimes hang-outs for actual criminals. Last year in Stockton, Calif. an emergency room doctor was arrested for allegedly stealing a watch from a dead patient after two nurses turned him in.

*Don't go to a hospital alone. In addition to fending off criminals in the waiting room, a friend or family member can be the squeaky wheel that prevents major catastrophes. This literature review found that patients are happier with outcomes in the ER when a family member witnesses the care.