

Psychiatric patients wait average of 11.5 hours in ER

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(HealthDay) -- Average emergency department wait times for adult patients with psychiatric emergencies is 11.5 hours, and can be even longer for those who are older, uninsured, or intoxicated, according to research published online May 4 in the *Annals of Emergency Medicine*.

In an effort to identify patient and [clinical management](#) factors related to [emergency department](#) length of stay, Anthony P. Weiss, M.D., of Harvard Medical School in Boston, and colleagues conducted a prospective study involving 1,092 adults with psychiatric emergencies who were treated between June 2008 and May 2009 at one of five emergency departments.

The researchers found that, overall, the average emergency department length of stay was 11.5 hours, but this varied according to whether the patient was discharged to home (8.6 hours) or transferred to hospitals outside the system of care (15 hours). The patient's race, sex, or homeless status had no effect on emergency department time; however, older age and being uninsured tended to be associated with longer stays. On average, patients with positive alcohol screens had a 6.2-hour longer stay; those requiring diagnostic imaging had a 3.2-hour longer stay; and those requiring restraints had a 4.2-hour longer stay.

"The results of this study are important because they highlight the interrelatedness of the various components of the mental health system and provide objectively identified targets for quality improvement," the authors write.

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