

Why am I waiting?

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I was in the ER recently and there were only two other people in the waiting room, and yet I had to wait three hours to be seen by the doctor. Why?

A: When you are in the ER waiting area, you have no way of knowing what is happening within the ER itself. In this case, most likely there were people with life-threatening conditions being treated in the ER. Perhaps an ambulance came in with one or more casualties of a car accident. In a small emergency room like ours with one physician and limited nursing staff on duty, one very ill patient can occupy all of our resources for a long period of time. As a result, people with non-life-threatening conditions will have a longer wait. We know waiting is tough – and waiting without knowing why is tougher. As much as we can, we will keep you informed about the reason for any delays.

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On my last visit to your ER I took a number, was triaged, and then sat down to wait my turn. Several people came in after me and I saw them talking to staff at the Patient Registration desk and then they went through the doors ahead of me.

A: Because KDH is a small hospital, intake for our ER and for Diagnostic Imaging (x-ray, ultrasound, etc) happens in the same place. So the people you saw going through the doors leading out of the ER would have had pre-arranged appointments for diagnostic tests. People with pre-arranged appointments do not need to take a number – that is for Emergency patients only – and are asked to wait behind the red line at our Patient Welcome Centre. We ask people to wait behind the red line so that people talking to Patient Registration staff will not have their personal health information overheard.

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Why don't you post ER wait times? I want to have that information when deciding which hospital's ER I will visit.

A: We made the decision not to post wait times because, without an automated process for determining them, we would just be posting an educated guess that would often be inaccurate. It's difficult in general to predict ER wait times, but it is particularly so in a small emergency room like ours where one very ill patient can exhaust all resources. Wait times fluctuate rapidly, as there may be only a 30-minute wait at one point, and then a large trauma comes in that requires the attention of all staff for an extended period, and the wait shoots to several hours. That being said, you could reasonably expect to usually have a shorter wait time at KDH than you would in a big city hospital where they see a much greater volume of patients.

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Welcome to the KDH Emergency Room

IF YOUR CONDITION IS LIFE THREATENING (you are experiencing shortness of breath or chest pains, for example), please speak to any member of our staff on arrival. You will see the triage nurse immediately.

IF YOUR CONDITION IS NOT LIFE-THREATENING, please take a number and have a seat in our waiting area. You will see the doctor as soon as possible. When your number is called, a specially trained triage nurse will assess you to determine how quickly you need treatment. Your pulse, blood pressure, temperature and breathing will be measured and notes will be made of any allergies or medications you are taking. Our triage nurses place patients in priority sequence using the Canadian Triage Acuity Scale, which ranges from Triage Level 1, patients needing resuscitation, to Triage Level 5, non-urgent. After assessment by the triage nurse, you will be asked to take a seat in the waiting area until you are called to the Patient Registration desk. The registration clerk will ask for your name, address, Ontario Health Card (OHIP) number (or other health insurance plans), family doctor's name, and an emergency contact phone number. The clerk will make up a chart for you and give you an identification wrist-band. You will then return to the waiting area until you are called to a treatment room within the ER.

If at any time your condition worsens, please inform a member of our staff immediately.

Your Role as a Partner in Your Care. As a patient or family member, we ask that you be an active participant in your care – ask questions, let us know if you have any concerns, make sure you tell your healthcare team about any symptoms you may have, your health and family history, and the medications you are taking. We also ask that you be respectful – of other patients and families, of our staff, physicians and volunteers, and hospital property.

Our Commitment to You. As part of our commitment to partner with you and your family for Patient and Family Centred Care, we will treat you with dignity and respect, share information with you, and encourage you to participate in your care. We will tell you our names and our roles when we walk into a room where you are, and display our name badges prominently so that you can easily read them. We will answer any questions you may have and keep you informed about the reason for any delays.