PressGaney

EBOOK

The front door of healthcare redefined

From wait times to waiting rooms, explore actionable strategies that elevate patient experience and hospital ratings.

compass HEALTHCARE

Table of contents

03	Introduction
04	Understanding the ED landscape
07	Enhancing environmental services in EDs: Cleanliness as a metric of trust
10	Innovations in food and nutrition services
12	Harnessing technology and data to fuel meaningful improvements
14	Transform your ED, transform patient care

Introduction

The emergency department (ED) has long been a gateway to healthcare for incoming patients. So it's only natural that the way patients feel about the ED—about their treatment, its cleanliness, even the food—heavily influences their perception of the hospital. And because patient perceptions dramatically impact the reputational and financial well-being of any healthcare facility—especially in our new era of patient experience scores and social media—optimizing those perceptions has never been more important.

Data from the last few years, however, indicates that the longstanding gap in patient experiences between direct admits and those admitted through the ED has grown, substantially, into a statistically significant issue impacting overall experience scores. Research has made one thing clear: To improve the patient experience and potentially lower costs, hospitals need to rethink their approach to the ED, including areas they might have overlooked in the past—like food service and environmental services. Addressing persistent challenges through innovative strategies will help hospitals elevate patient experience and operational efficiency.

Understanding the ED landscape

Cleanliness perceptions are closely tied to overall ED experience and "Likelihood to Recommend" (LTR).

	Top-box scores for LTR when:		
Survey items	Not top box for clean	Top box for clean	Difference in scores
Comfort of waiting area	11.7	69.7	58
Courtesy of doctors	32.6	90.3	57.7
Courtesy of nurses	34.7	92	57.3
Doctors' concern for comfort	25.8	86.8	61
Doctors include you in treatment decision	27.5	86.4	58.9
Doctors' information regarding treatment	26.3	86.1	59.8
Doctors took time to listen	30.7	88.8	58.1
Likelihood of recommending	19	89.9	70.9
Nurses' attention to your needs	29.5	89.7	60.2
Nurses' concern for your privacy	29.4	90.1	60.7
Nurses' responses to request/ concerns	29.3	89.7	60.4
Nurses took time to listen	31.7	90.7	59
Overall rating of care	20.5	89.6	69.1
Staff cared about you as a person	21.4	89.8	68.4
Staff worked together to care for you	21.3	90	68.7
Waiting time to treatment area	24.4	77.8	53.4

The ED as the front door to healthcare

As the primary entry point for many patients, the ED plays a key role in shaping their perceptions of a hospital. Often, they'll spend extended periods of time there, giving them ample opportunity to form a first impression. At this stage, they have no other frame of reference for evaluating the hospital. But they pay attention to the details. Is it clean? Has anyone tried to help them, or do they feel ignored? How long have they been waiting? Have they been offered food—and, if so, was it appetizing or unappealing?

Admission rates through the ED have skyrocketed in the past five years, with some facilities reporting rates as high as 86%. This surge has put immense pressure on EDs, stretching resources thin and making it harder to provide consistently excellent patient experiences.

Wait times

Patients often face long waits in the ED—sometimes ranging from 12 hours to several days. Even after admission, it may take days for a bed to become available. The average time patients spend in the ED is 163 minutes, or nearly three hours, before being sent home.

Cleanliness

Perception of cleanliness is closely tied to the overall ED experience. As patient volumes increase, cleanliness scores tend to decline, reflecting the strain on operations. Cleanliness perceptions also greatly influence recommendations and LWBS (left without being served) rates.

ED cleanliness has a strong correlation to many survey items, including "staff worked together to care for you" and "staff cared about you as a person."

How significant is the impact of cleanliness? An analysis of 875 EDs nationwide shows that "cleanliness of ER/ED" is highly correlated with all survey items. The highest correlations are seen in "Likelihood to Recommend," "staff worked together to care for you," and "staff cared about you as a person."

Top 3 impacted factors:

1. **Waiting time to treatment area**
2. **Comfort of waiting area**
3. **Cleanliness of ED/ER**

Experience gap

Patient experience scores for ED admissions lag behind those of direct admits by up to 30 percentile points in both six- and 12-month data analyses. Organizations have significant opportunity to close this important gap, as the financial implications can be enormous.

Enhancing environmental services in EDs: Cleanliness as a metric of trust

The challenges facing EDs have intensified in recent years. ED visits have surged, as people delayed care during the pandemic and needed urgent treatment as a result. Staffing has also been a post-pandemic issue. Combine the two—more patients, less staff—and it's even more challenging to keep things clean.

But it's not simply a factor of being clean. Research shows that patients' perception of cleanliness often matters more than actual cleanliness, making aesthetics a critical focus for environmental services.

Several initiatives have shown promise in improving cleanliness as well as patient perceptions of cleanliness. In many cases, they've also increased patient experience scores significantly.

Patient "room refresher"

Created to increase visibility and awareness of housekeeping efforts while providing a more thorough and engaging daily clean. The "room refresher," who's part of the environmental services department, interacts with patients and their families to set expectations of EVS, provide a higher level of cleanliness, and project the image of clean with highly visible cleaning protocols. It's often referred to as high-profile cleaning.

Concierge

The hospital concierge has multiple responsibilities that are highly visible to patients. These include cleaning (wiping down seats, removing trash, maintaining the waiting room, sanitizing wheelchairs, etc.), sharing information about amenities and activities with patients and their families, and offering food while they wait.

Turning best practices into better ED experiences

Managing peak volumes, reducing wait times, and improving PX requires a cohesive, proactive approach. Take a page from a top hospital's playbook with key strategies that drive real impact.

- Leverage EPIC reports to pinpoint high-traffic periods and adjust resources accordingly
- Prioritize patient comfort with proactive room visits and enhanced daily cleaning for those who've been waiting over six hours
- Actively round on patients to identify sources of frustration, predict patients' needs, and improve outcomes
- Designate ambassadors to lead service recovery and patient visitations, as well as create more meaningful interactions

When these strategies come together, they don't just improve workflows—they elevate the entire patient experience.

"The outcomes have not only enhanced patient experience but also supported nurses in practicing at the top of license, reducing their burden, and improving their overall experience in the emergency department. As the Chief Nurse of Compass Healthcare and a former emergency department nurse, I can say with all confidence that this model is legacy work that will impact the ED experience for years to come."

– Aundrea Mills, RN, BSN, MHL
Chief Nursing Officer
Compass Healthcare

Measurable impacts

The real proof is in the numbers. Early pilots show a significant uplift in perceived cleanliness and experience.

One pilot location, after hiring a weekday "room refresher," saw a 6-point top-box increase in patient experience scores. Two months later, these facilities added a refresher for weekend coverage, and have since maintained top-box scores for five straight months.

These gains weren't an isolated win. They were part of a larger strategy to systemically drive improvements at pilot facilities. After putting a few best practices into action, facilities reported a 10% increase in patient experience scores, while nursing teams benefited from streamlined processes and reduced workloads.

Innovations in food and nutrition services

Current challenges

With increasing ED admissions, food service has become a growing challenge, stemming from issues like understaffing, limited resources, and capacity constraints. These challenges are far-reaching, impacting everything from the type and temperature of meals to how they are served, to patients' comfort while eating—even whether they receive a meal at all. For example, a hot tray of food can turn cold by the time it makes its way to a patient in the ED. Many ED rooms don't have over-bed tables, so a patient might wind up eating with a tray on their lap. ED patients typically don't have much choice of the food they order, and the variety is often lacking. Far too often, patients receive cold, generic boxed meals.

The result? Patient dissatisfaction, and a sense that the hospital just doesn't care about them. Food has healing properties, according to past research. It's an important part of the patient experience that can even ease anxiety as it nourishes.

ED-centric culinary solutions change experiences
Several exciting food service innovations are now being introduced in hospital EDs. These innovations have the potential to significantly improve patient experiences and outcome measures. For example, when patients receive a hot meal in the ED while waiting for a bed, patient experience scores improve. It helps patients feel seen and cared for during their transition from ED to inpatient status.

Tiered menus
Meal options can be customized for ED patients, from simple boxed meals to gourmet selections. These take into consideration differing tastes and potential food allergies. Menus can be built for diets and coding for the top nine allergies. Compass, for example, has built menus for their clients that address specific diets and coding for the top nine allergens to ensure patients' preferences and needs are accommodated.

Equipment
Hot holding cabinets and reheating technology keep meals at the right temperature. New serving options, like insulated trays and convenient tray designs for hallway patients, are also being developed.

Facilities implementing these tactics report notable improvements in patient experience.

Harnessing technology and data to fuel meaningful improvements

The power of actionable data and real-time feedback mechanisms are driving hospital efficiencies and improving patient experience scores.

QR codes

QR codes have streamlined nurse-initiated service requests. They help nurses manage EVS situations more effectively, curbing complaints and calls. This reduces inefficiencies and saves nurses several hours a week, so they can focus on their core duties. Compass is leveraging Press Ganey's Human Experience platform to capture real-time data to help drive improvements in several emergency departments across the country.

© Press Ganey 2025. All rights reserved. A PG Forsta company.

Automated inventory systems

Designed to automatically track depletion and signal restock earlier, these enhance workflows and ensure consistency in service delivery. Data-driven decision-making has been transformative for hospitals, which now have hard data to better guide how they allocate resources to improve patient and workforce experience.

Key data innovations include:

Predictive analytics

Using past performance and identifying patterns, predictive analytics can anticipate staffing needs and adjust operations dynamically, reducing costs and optimizing staff based on patient volumes.

Patient experience metrics

Patient experience metrics are lagging indicators that help organizations evaluate the impact of their interventions. By tracking changes in mean scores, response favorability, or "top-box" ratings, organizations can use the data as a guidepost to decide whether to stay the course or adjust their approach.

Transform your ED, transform patient care

Multiple data analyses show a clear financial and reputational need for hospitals to adopt transformative ED solutions. To boost patient experience and remain competitive, hospitals must turn these “front doors” into hubs of innovation and excellence in care. Collaboration across all stakeholders will drive meaningful, lasting improvements. And Compass and Press Ganey are here to help.

For more information about this e-book, reach out at: **compass-healthcare.com/contact**

For a deep dive into Press Ganey’s solutions, visit: **pressganey.com/request-a-demo**

© Press Ganey 2025. All rights reserved. A PG Forsta company.

pressganey.com

EB-P0000