

News Release-OSF HealthCare using 'virtual ER' to cut patient wait times

No one *wants* to go to a hospital emergency department (ED), but sometimes, there's no avoiding it.

As OSF HealthCare joins other health systems struggling with staffing shortages, it is also seeing patients without access to primary care showing up in emergency rooms and facing long waits for less serious health issues. To meet the challenge of long wait times, OSF is turning to virtual technology to move patients through their ED experience more efficiently.

Anyone coming into the hospital emergency department at OSF HealthCare Saint Elizabeth Medical Center in either Peru or Ottawa, Illinois will be triaged to determine the seriousness of their condition or injury. Patients who qualify for this time saving option for care will be taken to one of our virtual care rooms where a nurse helps establish a video connection and assists the patient with any hands-on equipment needed for a video visit with the virtual provider.

"Our virtual physician will be able to do an assessment of each patient virtually, through the use of advanced technology and the onsite nurse. They will develop an appropriate treatment plan, coordinate prescriptions, and a follow up care plan," says Dawn Trompeter, president of OSF Saint Elizabeth Medical Center. "We want to offer a better experience for everyone, and qualified patients can be seen more quickly and get on the road to recovery."

Studies also reveal prolonged emergency department wait times and length of a visit reduces quality care and increases adverse events for patients with serious illnesses. "So, the goal with introducing this new model is to improve patient care as well as our patients' experience," Trompeter stresses.

The virtual emergency care area is located within the hospital emergency department and includes a mobile cart equipped with two-way audio and video capabilities, making it easy to have a conversation with the remote medical provider. The mobile units have high-resolution cameras to observe symptoms or injuries more closely.

A nurse or medical staff member will assist with completing the patient assessment using the advanced digital tools on the mobile units that allow the virtual doctor to hear a patient's breath and cardiac sounds or look more closely into the patient's eyes and ears, just as they would do if they were physically in the room.

"We will work together to take care of patients with the same high standard of care given by our in-person physicians," says Benjamin Kemp, MD, the lead physician for virtual emergency care.

If at any time the care team thinks someone needs to be seen in person by a doctor, they can be immediately transferred to the traditional ED.

"If a patient requires care that is too complex for virtual interaction, we will easily and seamlessly work with the in-person team to get the great care patients deserve," Dr. Kemp emphasizes.

OSF is using several innovative approaches to reduce ED wait times and improve the overall experience, including using virtual behavioral health clinicians to make sure people with mental health issues are seen within the target goal of one hour. Additionally, [research is underway](#) to see if predictive modeling using artificial intelligence can help match staffing with surge times.

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Photo cutline: Remote OSF Physician in a virtual exam with an emergency room patient

Photo portraits: OSF HealthCare Saint Elizabeth Medical Center President Dawn Trompeter
OSF HealthCare Saint Elizabeth Medical Center lead physician for virtual emergency care, Dr. Benjamin Kemp

OSF HealthCare is an integrated health system founded by The Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis. Headquartered in Peoria, Illinois, OSF HealthCare has 17 hospitals – 10 acute care, five critical access, 1 transitional care - with 2,131 licensed beds throughout Illinois and Michigan. OSF employs nearly 24,000 Mission Partners across 150+ locations; has two colleges of nursing; operates OSF Home Care Services, an extensive network of home health and hospice services; owns Pointcore, Inc., comprised of health care-related businesses; OSF HealthCare Foundation, the philanthropic arm for the organization; and OSF Ventures, which provides investment capital for promising health care innovation startups. In 2020, OSF OnCall was established, a digital health operating unit, including a hospital-at-home. OSF OnCall delivers care and services when, where and how patients prefer to receive them. OSF HealthCare has been recognized by *Fortune* as one of the most innovative companies in the country. More at osfhealthcare.org.

OSF OnCall, part of Peoria, Illinois-based OSF HealthCare, offers unique, full-scale digital health and convenient care options. Providing an array of services anytime, anywhere, OSF OnCall includes digital platforms and software to connect people with care 24/7 using smartphone apps, text-based check-ins and video visits with live support. [OSF OnCall Urgent Care](#) offers in-person or virtual visits for minor injuries and illness. [OSF OnCall Connect](#) supports people through digital and at-home care. OSF OnCall also represents other at-home and hospital-based digital care including remote monitoring, intensive care and hospitalist programs, as well as a digital hospital option. Learn more at osfoncall.org.