The ER “Epidemic”
Scope and Intervention Strategies

The Quadruple Aim: Working Together, Achieving Success
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The ER 'Epidemic': Scope and Intervention Strategies

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Goal: Determine when, where and why Americans get treatment for acute health problems and flare-ups of chronic disease

Data sources: three federal surveys of ambulatory care in the United States between 2001 and 2004:
- National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey of office visits;
- National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey, outpatient department subsample; and
- NHAMCS emergency department subsample
What is “Acute Care?”

- “Major reason for this visit” coded as “acute” or “chronic disease flare-up” (NAMCS or in the NHAMCS outpatient sample), or
- “Episode of care” coded as “initial” (in NAMCS and either of the NHAMCS subsamples)
- We assumed that no ER physician served as the patient’s “personal physician”
Two-Thirds of Outpatient Visits in the U.S. are for Non-Acute Care…

Annual average visits in 1000s, 2001-2004; N=345,000

- General/family practice
- General pediatrics
- General internal medicine
- Emergency department
- Hospital outpatient dep’t.
- Orthopedics
- Dermatology
- Ophthalmology
- Obstetrics/gynecology
- Otolaryngology
- General surgery
- Cardiology
- Urology
- Neurology
- Psychiatry
- Other

Red = Acute problem
Blue = Follow-up visits
A Minority of all Acute Care Visits Involve the Patient’s Personal Physician…

Annual average **acute care** visits in 1000s, 2001-2004; N=345,000

- **Primary care**
- **Emergency department**
  - Office hours
  - After-hours
  - Weekends
- **Hosp. OPD**
- **Specialist**
Most Acute Care Visits to Primary Care MDs Involve Minor Complaints

- **All acute visits (353.7 million)**
  - Emergency department: 28.9 million (8.2%)
  - Primary care: 220.0 million (62.1%)
  - Specialty: 64.3 million (18.3%)
  - Outpatient department: 10.5 million (2.9%)

- **Upper resp complaint (66.0 million)**
  - Emergency department: 6.7 million (10.2%)
  - Primary care: 46.8 million (71.2%)
  - Specialty: 4.8 million (7.3%)
  - Outpatient department: 10.7 million (16.3%)

- **Headache (7.6 million)**
  - Emergency department: 0.7 million (9.2%)
  - Primary care: 4.2 million (56.6%)
  - Specialty: 1.5 million (20.0%)
  - Outpatient department: 1.0 million (13.2%)

- **Any injury (78.6 million)**
  - Emergency department: 4.3 million (5.5%)
  - Primary care: 48.5 million (62.0%)
  - Specialty: 9.0 million (11.5%)
  - Outpatient department: 16.8 million (21.7%)

- **Abdominal pain (13.4 million)**
  - Emergency department: 0.6 million (4.5%)
  - Primary care: 6.9 million (51.9%)
  - Specialty: 4.0 million (30.0%)
  - Outpatient department: 2.0 million (14.6%)

- **Dyspnea (7.5 million)**
  - Emergency department: 0.6 million (8.0%)
  - Primary care: 4.4 million (58.7%)
  - Specialty: 1.8 million (24.0%)
  - Outpatient department: 1.5 million (20.0%)

- **Chest pain (9.0 million)**
  - Emergency department: 0.3 million (3.6%)
  - Primary care: 5.6 million (62.2%)
  - Specialty: 2.5 million (27.8%)
  - Outpatient department: 0.6 million (7.0%)

- **Laceration (6.0 million)**
  - Emergency department: 0.7 million (12.0%)
  - Primary care: 4.3 million (71.8%)
  - Specialty: 0.6 million (10.0%)
  - Outpatient department: 0.2 million (3.4%)

*Unreliable estimates: std error > 30% of estimate*
ER Docs Disproportionately Care for the Poor & Uninsured

Active physicians (597,430)

Total acute visits (273 million)

Acute visit by underinsured—Medicaid or SCHIP (39 million)

Acute visits by uninsured (24 million)
Police psychiatric escort

Clinic / doctor's office

Referral hospitals

Nursing home

EMS / private vehicle

Homeless / uninsured

EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT
What Are the Alternatives?
Patient-Centered Medical Homes

- Envisioned as practices that feature:
  - Clinicians trained to provide first contact, continuous, and comprehensive care
  - A team that takes responsibility for care of their patients—whole-person orientation
  - Care coordinated across all elements of the health care system
  - Provides enhanced access to care
Accountable Care Organizations

- How quickly will they form?
- Will buy-in be achieved?
- Will enhanced access be part of their agenda?

“Medical neighborhood”

- Community-based services
- Specialists
- Hospitals and nursing homes
- Urgent care and emergency centers
- Diagnostic centers
Consumer-directed care
- Consumers with “skin in the game,” choose from a healthcare marketplace

Concierge medicine
- An up-market approach to primary care?
- Good for some patients and problems

Retail clinics & Urgent Care Centers
- Offer expanded hours
- Address a limited scope of problems
- Cheap, but may induce demand
Marcus Welby, MD: America’s Idealized Primary Care Doctor

- Starred Robert Young and James Brolin
- Dr. Welby reflected the view that primary care physicians are always available when their patients need them
Thank You