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# Same day emergency care (ambulatory emergency care)



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## What is it?

The focus on increasing the number of elective procedures that are carried out as day cases (see [same day elective care](#)) has only recently encompassed emergency care. There is a significant potential for the delivery of 'same day emergency care', which is better for both patients and healthcare providers.

Sometimes called 'ambulatory emergency care', same day emergency care is a transformational change in care delivery similar to that seen in elective day surgery. It is a way of managing a significant proportion of emergency patients on the same day without admission to a hospital bed. Patients are managed in a timely and clinically appropriate way with rapid access to diagnostics and robust clinical assessment. Same day emergency care gives the opportunity to better manage patient flow, improve patient experience and reduce acute hospital admissions.

The Royal College of Physicians defines ambulatory care as: "Clinical care which may include diagnosis, observation, treatment and rehabilitation not provided within the traditional hospital bed base or within the traditional outpatient services that can be provided across the primary/secondary care interface."

## When to use it

If your organisation provides emergency care, then consider same day emergency care – it should be the default position for emergency patients unless their clinical needs require admission.

The Ambulatory Emergency Care Directory was first published in 2007 by the NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement, updated in 2010 and 2012, with the 4th edition released in September 2014. The AEC Network has been created to enable successful implementation of AEC and has released an updated version of the directory in 2016 ([www.ambulatoryemergencycare.org.uk/BAAEC/BAAEC-Resources/AEC-Directory](http://www.ambulatoryemergencycare.org.uk/BAAEC/BAAEC-Resources/AEC-Directory)). Clinical scenarios within the directory have been reviewed and updated to ensure that they reflect current evidence and codes. A new feature is the identification of potential nurse-led clinical scenarios.

The underlying principle of Ambulatory Emergency Care (AEC) is that a significant proportion of adult patients requiring emergency care can be managed safely and appropriately on the same day either without admission to a hospital bed at all or admission for only a number of hours.

Many more conditions and co-morbidities than are specified in the directory can be managed in an ambulatory way and it is not intended to be an exhaustive list.

The initial analysis of national data producing the *Directory of Ambulatory Emergency Care for Adults* lists 49 emergency clinical scenarios that are suitable for same day

emergency care. These would be patients that are traditionally admitted to a hospital bed overnight. See [www.ambulatoryemergencycare.org.uk/Tools-and-Resources/AEC-Directory](http://www.ambulatoryemergencycare.org.uk/Tools-and-Resources/AEC-Directory) for the latest edition.

## How to use it

Initially the focus of same day emergency care was to identify high volume emergency scenarios that could possibly be treated on the same day and change services to make this possible. However the experience of organisations that tried this approach showed that it was far more effective to adopt a process-based approach rather than a scenario or pathway-based approach.

This means providing a service where all patients are considered for same day emergency care, with it being the default position until otherwise proven. This approach ensures the maximum number of patients benefit from rapid access to the right treatment and ensures the benefits of same day emergency care are maximised.

Experience of organisations that have developed same day emergency care services have identified the following important factors:

- It is essential to have senior clinical input at the point of referral to redirect suitable patients to same day emergency care services. Continued access to senior clinical staff is key for the service to work effectively.
- The location of same day emergency care services is important. Where possible the service should be located close to the emergency department.
- Patients should be told as early on in the process as possible, ideally in A&E or by their GP, that they are likely to receive treatment on the same day and are unlikely to be admitted overnight. This helps to manage their expectations and those of their carers.
- Good communication and staff training is needed across the local healthcare system to ensure that all appropriate patients are directed to the same day emergency care service.
- Clear measures need to be used to monitor the impact, quality and efficiency of same day emergency care services.

## Example

South Tees Hospital NHS Foundation Trust has been one of the pioneers in developing same day emergency care services. Implementing them resulted in a change from 6% to 40% in same day discharge over a three-year period up to 2012. This subsequently rose to 50% by 2015 and while this may not be solely attributed to same day emergency care, the trust believes it has played a significant role. Patient experience and satisfaction have both improved. Patients appreciate early input from consultants, rapid diagnostics and a shorter stay that avoids having to stay in hospital overnight.

## What next?

As with same day elective care, there should be a continued focus on increasing the types of emergency patients and conditions that can be treated on the same day. There are continual developments in diagnostics and techniques that lead to it being possible to treat an ever increasing proportion of emergency patients on the same day.