



EMERGENCY CARE BRIEF

Launching a Pediatric Service Upgrade: Critical Success Factors



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INTRODUCTION

You've explored the options. You've carefully considered the financial, administrative and community impact of upgrading your emergency or urgent care service for children. And now you're ready to move ahead. All systems are finally "go." As you move forward, you will face several critical decisions, the results of which will dramatically impact the success of your new operation.

In this Brief, I highlight ten factors critical to the successful launch of a new or significantly improved pediatric emergency or urgent care service. As any seasoned administrator knows, it's amazing how often great ideas turn upside down during implementation. It's after project approval when the real challenge begins: that of translating your goals and vision into an operational, successful service line.

1. Begin with the end in mind.

Each institution, and each emergency department or urgent care center, holds its own unique vision of pediatric services. At one end, the vision may include a major physical renovation for establishing a new and separate pediatric emergency department. At the other end, the vision may call for staff educational training, or for addressing equipment, facilities or administrative concerns. The essential ingredient is a clear sense of outcome—of what you want to accomplish with changes—so the changes you do make fulfill your vision and meet your goals.

2. Create a child- and family-centered culture.

Differentiating your institution from others in your region requires more than renovations and process changes. If you truly want your center to be viewed as "*the place*" to go for pediatric emergency or urgent care, you must create a physical and attitudinal environment that clearly and unequivocally proclaims: "We welcome you; we are focused on taking care of your child." This caring attitude must extend through all family communications and interactions. Tall order? Yes. Impossible? No. While not easy to accomplish, a focused, cultural change will truly help your department stand out.





3. First impressions really count.

If you quickly exceed a family's expectations, you prepare them for a great experience in your facility. Even if a family hits some minor bumps along the way, their initial sense of "this is going to be ok after all" will help offset those bumps. On the other hand, if a family's initial experience is less than ideal—if they sense an uncaring attitude or perceive incompetence—it becomes very difficult to create an overall positive experience, even if the rest of the visit goes exceptionally well. Because first impressions count so much toward overall satisfaction, it's essential to focus on how to enhance the first few minutes of every patient's visit. For example, a greeter can point the family in the right direction. A triage nurse can be warm, welcoming and friendly, and make sure the family's concerns are addressed. Registration staff can promote a caring environment and ensure confidentiality is maintained. For an ideal first impression, bring the patient and family to an open examination room as soon as possible.

4. Pay careful attention to critical physical facility issues.

While you face a myriad of decisions regarding physical facilities, certain principal choices build a solid foundation for a welcoming physical environment. Create as much separation as possible between adult patients and families arriving with children. Consider whether separate triage areas or waiting rooms make sense for your department. Ideally, outfit one or two examination rooms, at minimum, with appropriate pediatric décor. You don't have to paint pink elephants on the wall; instead, consider keeping the room's use flexible enough for adults too by adding appropriate décor elements. Don't forget toddler safety: address outlet locations, bathrooms and drawers within reach. Families always appreciate your efforts to distinguish your facility as a child-focused center of care.

How to help staff to more capably and confidently calm crying, squirming and screaming kids?

How can you increase your facility's pediatric volume?





5. Be realistic about physician staffing requirements.

As you prepare to enhance your center's level of pediatric care, you may consider recruiting physicians who are board certified in pediatric emergency medicine. These physicians, certified through the American Board of Pediatrics or the American Board of Emergency Medicine, have received focused training in pediatric emergency care; they embody an obvious commitment to excellence in care for children's emergencies. This also means these professionals are low in supply and high in demand. Only 1,600 or so physicians nationwide have received this designation, and most work mainly in tertiary, academic medical centers.

Some board certified pediatric emergency physicians do work in community hospital settings, but this pool is relatively small. Convincing a board certified pediatric emergency physician to relocate requires an especially good fit between physician and hospital needs. It is therefore important to be flexible when considering physician staffing requirements. Many board certified emergency physicians bring with them tremendous experience caring for ill and injured children. Some board certified pediatricians have been providing excellent acute care for years. Experienced mid-level providers, such as pediatric nurse practitioners or physician assistants, may be another option for your institution. The critical factor for your success is to carefully and realistically address your provider staffing requirements to ensure your organization's needs are met.

6. Establish a nursing pediatric coordinator.

Nursing staff is another clear, critical success factor. It is essential that nursing staff both know what they're doing when it comes to pediatric care, and that they enjoy doing it. Even the smallest program will benefit by identifying a nursing pediatric coordinator. This individual may take a leadership role for helping to educate staff, and for establishing a child- and family-centered care culture. Naming a nursing pediatric coordinator is also a great way to recognize someone on your staff with these interests and talents, and to allow him or her to creatively bring the nursing staff to a new level of focused pediatric care.

How to shorten how long it takes for emergency procedures?





7. Involve your community physicians in the process.

From an organizational development perspective, it's important to address key relationships that will feel the impact of your upgraded operation. Physicians in your community who refer (or have the potential to refer) patients to your ED are an important component of volume and financial success. And yet, frequently, these key providers are left to fend for themselves. Community physicians might feel alienated from the hospital "hub"; the larger the hospital system, the more likely this is to happen. Embarking on a pediatric services upgrade provides a tremendous opportunity to gain external support for your ED or urgent care center. Existing community physician relationships can be repaired or strengthened by understanding issues and concerns from their perspective.

How to lessen the need for pharmacologic sedation?

What specific things can increase unit revenue?

8. Include emergency department or urgent care staff in decision making.

Successful implementation of pediatric care changes requires staff buy-in; when staff feel they "own" the change of departmental transitions, they are more motivated and step up to the plate with enthusiasm. Critical to the success of your change is to figure out how to unleash the creative potential of your staff as you move forward. For example, assign an informal leader to organize "brainstorming" sessions for potential enhancements. You may be amazed at their ideas; or you may discover that an existing idea needs reworking for a successful implementation to happen.





9. *If your institution has a pediatrics department, include its members.*

While many departments within larger institutions frequently work with the ED, no department will be more critical to successful implementation than the Department of Pediatrics. At community hospitals, pediatric leadership in the hospital and community frequently overlap. Again, enhancing pediatric emergency services offers a fabulous opportunity to tackle problems and strengthen relationships within the hospital structure. As you move forward, include physician leadership from departments that interface with your ED or urgent care center.

How to help nurses and physicians reduce fear and anxiety in young patients?

What can reduce the number of parental complaints?

How can you improve the actual and perceived care of children at your facility?



10. *Market aggressively, but with integrity.*

Some emergency departments or urgent care centers, notably those without competition, see no need to engage in marketing. Others facing competitive markets can build patient volume by letting the community know about their expertise in and enhancements for emergency and urgent care for children. Excellence in pediatric care may even help increase adult visits. While marketing is important, possibly even critical to the success of your change, it's essential to market with integrity. For example, secure the services of physicians experienced in pediatric care before you spread the word about your new staff. Through aggressive but appropriate marketing, you will differentiate your services from those of other departments in the community with a less child-friendly focus.



> *Conclusion*

Launching a service upgrade focused on enhancing care for children is a significant investment of financial and human resources. With appropriate planning, and with careful implementation, your enhancements will pay off by way of improved pediatric care for your community, as well as enhanced recognition and financial gain for your institution.

Please get in touch if you have questions, comments or concerns related to your specific emergency department or urgent care practice. I would be glad to discuss your particular situation with you.

How can you differentiate your emergency facility in parents' minds?

Can you attract and retain dedicated staff?

To keep up-to-date on what's new in emergency and urgent care, or to learn more about enhancing emergency and urgent care services, sign up for our complimentary e-Newsletter, *Spotlight on Emergency Care*, at www.petrackconsulting.com.





Pettrack Consulting is dedicated to helping leadership and staff bring excellence to emergency and urgent care services. We work collaboratively with you to fully understand your goals and objectives, as well as to address programmatic initiatives and deliver measurable outcomes. Our focused background in emergency medicine, administrative medicine and organizational development allows us to create uniquely effective solutions for enhancing care in your emergency or urgent care facility.

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