Freestanding Emergency Centers

**Description**

Freestanding emergency centers were introduced in the 1970s to provide access to emergency care in communities that could not support hospital-based emergency services. 1 Freestanding emergency centers provide increasing access to emergency services as emergency visits rise and overwhelm hospital based emergency departments. In 2016 there were 172 independent freestanding emergency centers within the United States. 2 As of July 2018, 221 freestanding emergency centers are licensed and open for operation in the state of Texas. 3

The Emergency Nurses Association has had no position statement regarding the appropriate use of this alternate emergency care model. There is currently no consistent definition of freestanding emergency centers and rapid growth of this care model has led to confusion and indecision regarding the role they should play in emergency care. 4 Standards for appropriate and safe staffing are not addressed in the Emergency Nurses Association Scope and Standards of Practice.

Emergency department overcrowding has become a major problem worldwide and has been associated with a range of poor patient’s outcomes, including increased patient mortality, increased rates of medical errors, increased number of delayed or missed orders, increased total length of stay, decreased door to imaging times for stroke patients, poorer outcomes for chest pain patients, increased time to surgery, analgesia, antibiotics, and critical severe sepsis therapies, decreased patient satisfaction and increased rates of patents leaving without being seen. Overcrowding has also had a vast impact on nursing staff including, increased nursing workload, burnout, and staff turnover. 5

**Texas ENA Position**

It is the position of the Texas Emergency Nurses Association that:

1. Nurses providing care in freestanding emergency centers have a minimum of 2 years emergency nursing experience.
2. Freestanding emergency centers have adequate nurse staffing to provide safe and quality care.
3. Nurses that provide care in freestanding emergency centers complete the Trauma Nursing Core Corse as well as the Emergency Nursing Pediatric Course in addition to state mandated educational requirements
4. Nurses providing care in freestanding emergency centers are urged to hold a national certification in the field of emergency nursing.
5. Freestanding emergency center management develops and implements adequate safety measures to provide safe environment standards for nurses, patients, and visitors.
6. Freestanding emergency centers provide quality access to patients seeking emergency care in the communities they serve.
7. All staff including ancillary staff have at minimum basic life support training to support clinical staff if needed for a critical patient.

References

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