An African American man with a history of diabetes, hypertension, stroke, and a recent fall at home presented to the emergency room early one evening.

He had a cursory evaluation at triage and was provided a wheelchair to sit in as he waited to be seen. After an hour of waiting, he was given a container to collect urine. Despite limited mobility, he walked himself to the restroom without assistance, collected the urine, and found his way back to the wheelchair where he waited. Hours passed; other patients with apparent less acute presentations were walked back and seen as he sat in his wheelchair; no one checked on him. Eventually, despite feeling reluctant to speak up for fear of displeasing the nurse and receiving hostility, he tried to get the attention of the desk nurse to determine when he’d be seen and asked for pain medication for a growing headache. The nurse spoke in an uncaring and loud voice, telling him that the ER was too busy to deal with this and that he needed to wait for his turn. She added that he was fine and didn’t need pain medication. He asked if they could call his son and ask him to pick him up, but the nurse walked away without responding.

After several more hours of sitting and not being cared for, he felt unsafe and asked if he could call his son to pick him up. The nurse told him that there was nothing wrong with him and if he wanted to call to be picked up, that was up to him. Eight hours later, the first and only call that was provided to him was from his father. Through slurred and weakened speech, his father asked to be picked up. The nurse told him that there was nothing wrong with him and if he wanted to call to be picked up, that was up to him. Eight hours later, the first and only call that was placed to the son was from his father. Through slurred and weakened speech, his father asked to be picked up. When the son arrived, his father was outside sitting at the curb unattended and in a wheelchair. He was confused, weak and crying. They left for home, discouraged and distrustful of whether quality care would be received.

Early the next morning, hours after leaving the ER, the father appeared by ambulance at the ER, once again, after having suffered a severe stroke.
Case Example #5 — Part 2

Safety Strategies

Health inequity and implicit bias

An African American man with a history of diabetes, hypertension, stroke, and a recent fall at home presented to the emergency room early one evening. He had a cursory evaluation at triage and was provided a wheelchair to sit in as he waited to be seen. After an hour of waiting, he was given a container to collect urine. Despite limited mobility, he walked himself to the restroom without assistance, collected the urine, and found his way back to the wheelchair where he waited. Hours passed; other patients with apparent less acute presentations were walked back and seen as he sat in his wheelchair; no one checked on him. Eventually, despite feeling reluctant to speak up for fear of displeasing the nurse and receiving hostility, he tried to get the attention of the desk nurse to determine when he’d be seen and asked for pain medication for a growing headache. The nurse spoke in an uncaring and loud voice, telling him that the ER was too busy to deal with this and that he needed to wait for his turn. She added that he was fine and didn’t need pain medication. He asked if they could call his son and ask him to pick him up, but the nurse walked away without responding.

After several more hours of sitting and not being cared for, he felt unsafe and asked if he could call his son to pick him up. The nurse told him that there was nothing wrong with him and if he wanted to call to be picked up, that was up to him.

Eight hours later, the first and only call that was placed to the son was from his father. Through slurred and weakened speech, his father asked to be picked up. When the son arrived, his father was outside sitting at the curb unattended and in a wheelchair. He was confused, weak and crying. They left for home, discouraged and distrustful of whether quality care would be received.

Early the next morning, hours after leaving the ER, the father appeared by ambulance at the ER, once again, after having suffered a severe stroke.

Recognizing a significant need to transform its approach to health equity, the organization made health equity a strategic priority at a system-level and identified eliminating racism and decreasing health disparity as core values. The organization performed a self-assessment to understand its current racial climate and focus on health equity, cultural competence, and patient-centered care. Using the IHI Health Equity Self-Assessment Tool for Health Care Organizations, the organization evaluated and developed improvement strategies around 5 strategic components:

1. Make health equity a strategic priority.
2. Develop structure and processes to support health equity work.
3. Deploy specific strategies to address the multiple determinants of health on which health care organizations can have a direct impact, such as health care services, socioeconomic status, physical environment, and healthy behaviors.
4. Decrease institutional racism within the organization.
5. Develop partnerships with community organizations to improve health and equity.

The organization implemented mandatory annual training to develop cultural competencies regarding equitable, respectful, and caring engagement of all patients, families, and care partners. It also incorporated training for individuals to self-assess their own bias (implicit bias) to recognize and incorporate strategies and skills (such as perspective-taking) to mitigate its effects.

The organization improved its incident reporting capabilities to adequately capture incidents regarding health inequity, disparity, and/or racism whether subtle or overt, and to establish targeted solutions for remediation and improvement for areas of concern.
Case Example #5 — Resources

Health inequity and implicit bias

RESOURCES


Published March 2021