FCN Thoughts: When and Who Do I call?

Emergencies, by definition, are unexpected occurrences. Last month we spoke of preparations for weather related emergencies. (We are all are ready now, with our go-bags and evacuation plans in place, aren’t we?) This month I want to address medical emergencies: determining when to call your primary care provider vs. urgent vs. emergent medical needs. Thinking through potential emergencies ahead of time and understanding your options will help you in making decisions in the rush of the moment when an emergency occurs.

***Faith Community Nurse***

Assists in integrating health, wellness, and faith; offers education, prayer, and personal support for medical challenges; provides support for transition to home after hospitalization or surgery; makes referrals to community programs; develops education programs and support groups according to the needs of the congregation; may make recommendations of non-urgent/emergent medical care.

**Note:** If you think you may need to go to the emergency room or call 911—don’t wait—DO IT!

***Primary Care Provider*** [doctor, nurse practitioner (NP) or physician’s assistant (PA)]

These providers work with your long-term medical needs, provides care for minor illness, prescribes medications, and helps determine care for new symptoms, including referrals to specialists. Often these providers are not available for same day visits and may not be able to return a call that day, so if you do not feel your concerns can wait, choose the next option.

***Urgent/Prompt/Rapid Care Facility*** (Sonora Adventist Health: 1 in Angels Camp, 1 in Sonora)

Walk in facilities when your feel you need same day (urgent, non-emergent) care, such as

minor illness or injuries, rash, minor cuts or burns, moderate gastrointestinal issues, or minor infections.

***Emergency Room (ER)*** (Mark Twain Hospital, Sonora Adventist Health, Sutter Amador Jackson)

If you feel you need immediate attention and your concern is more severe than those mentioned above, the ER may be your best choice. Symptoms such as chest or severe abdominal pain; difficulty breathing; numbness in face, arms, or legs; head trauma; severe bleeding; sudden dizziness, weakness or loss of balance; or severe burns (see Call 911 below). Mental health crises may require a visit to the ER for further evaluation. Do not be concerned about your issue not being severe enough to warrant ER care. Sometimes it takes expertise of the ER providers to make that determination. They are there to help you and concur it is far better to err on the side of caution.

***Call 911***

Consider calling 911 for more immediate treatment and to get to care quickly. Many problems, such as symptoms of heart attack or stroke, will have better outcomes the more rapidly you obtain care. Do not hesitate! Never attempt to drive yourself if you have severe chest pain <https://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/heart_attack.htm> , have signs of stroke <https://www.cdc.gov/stroke/signs_symptoms.htm>, or have passed out. Be aware the ambulance may take you to your nearest hospital, rather than your preferred facility. If you live in Amador or Calaveras Counties investigate purchasing an American Legion Ambulance Service subscription which covers transportation for immediate family members for a reasonable fee. <https://www.alpost108.org/ambulance-service>

No one wants to have a medical emergency, but we can all be prepared by learning when to ask for help. “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.” Colossians 4:2 (NIV)