



Free Health Care Advice Just a Phone Call Away

*New, 24-Hour Nurse Call Center
Helps You Avoid Crowded Emergency Rooms*

HOUSTON (April 7, 2014) – Citizens in Houston, Harris County and the eight surrounding counties now have a new resource at their fingertips – a 24-hour Nurse Triage Call Center that will help them with healthcare questions and choose the most appropriate place for care.

Regardless of healthcare affiliation, primary care provider, or insurance status, a bilingual staff is available 24 hours, every day to answer calls on the **Nurse Health Line – 713-338-7979** – to assess callers' primary health concerns and direct them to an appropriate level of care.

“When you don’t feel well, the last thing you want to do is wait in a crowded emergency room,” said Dan Wolterman, President and CEO of Memorial Hermann Health System. “This new, free community-wide resource lets you talk directly with a Registered Nurse who will ask questions, determine what level of care you need, then refer you to an appropriate resource. It’s important to note that this service is not just for Memorial Hermann patients; it is available to all residents living in Harris County and the greater Houston region.”

The Nurse Health Line is one of several Memorial Hermann-sponsored Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment, or DSRIP programs. Memorial Hermann is part of Region 3’s Southeast Texas Regional Healthcare Partnership anchored by Harris Health System, and includes the counties of: Austin, Calhoun, Chambers, Colorado, Fort Bend, Matagorda, Waller, and Wharton.

“The Nurse Health Line is an example of a smart solution to a regional problem – more efficient delivery of healthcare,” said Harris County Judge Ed Emmett. “While Harris Health is the anchor of Region 3, this service will benefit citizens in Harris County, as well as eight other counties. It can potentially improve access to care and enable more efficient use of the emergency rooms in this region because trained nurses will answer calls and help direct people who are uncertain about what they should do when they have a health concern.”

After an assessment is made, callers will be advised to seek care with their physician of choice or referred to local emergent care centers. Additionally, community health workers will be available to provide information on free or low cost community resources or clinics.

The Nurse Health Line is not designed to assist with life-threatening conditions or emergencies. People with life-threatening conditions and emergencies should immediately call 911.

“With visits to the emergency room at an all-time high in Houston, wait times have skyrocketed,” said Mayor Annise Parker. “This program will help us make sure that ambulances



and emergency rooms are available for crises, and non-critical healthcare is delivered in a more appropriate setting. The health cost savings for our community may be significant.”

More than 46 percent of all patients treated and released from emergency rooms in Harris County are primary care treatable, according to a study conducted by the University of Texas School of Public Health.

These visits result, in part, because patients do not have the clinical knowledge to assess the severity of symptoms of less emergent conditions and determine where to go for appropriate care. Consequently, emergency rooms in southeast Texas are at capacity and facilities struggle to meet the needs of patients in a timely manner.

All calls to the Nurse Health Line are confidential and addressed by a staff of professionals who are experienced in assessment of clinical situations. To help patients who call, nurses use their training, experience, evidence-based decision-support tools, and peer-reviewed materials to conduct their assessments.

DSRIP projects like the Nurse Health Line are approved and funded through the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services and Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). The Texas HHSC approves DSRIP projects through the 1115-Waiver application process which gives the U.S. Health and Human Services department authority to approve experimental, pilot, or demonstration projects that promote the objectives of CMS and CHIP programs.

“A primary goal of the Nurse Health Line is to improve access to care and ensure more efficient use of the emergency rooms in Houston, including Harris and the surrounding counties,” said Carol Paret, Chief, Community Benefits Officer, Privacy and Security Officer for Memorial Hermann. “Based on historical experience, projections indicate that approximately 25 percent of the calls will be triaged to a lower-level care setting.”

In recent years, emergency rooms at local public and private hospitals in Harris County regularly have gone on ‘drive-by status,’ requiring ambulances to divert seriously ill or injured patients to other facilities.

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