eBook

Optimizing Emergency Department Operations with Care Coordination
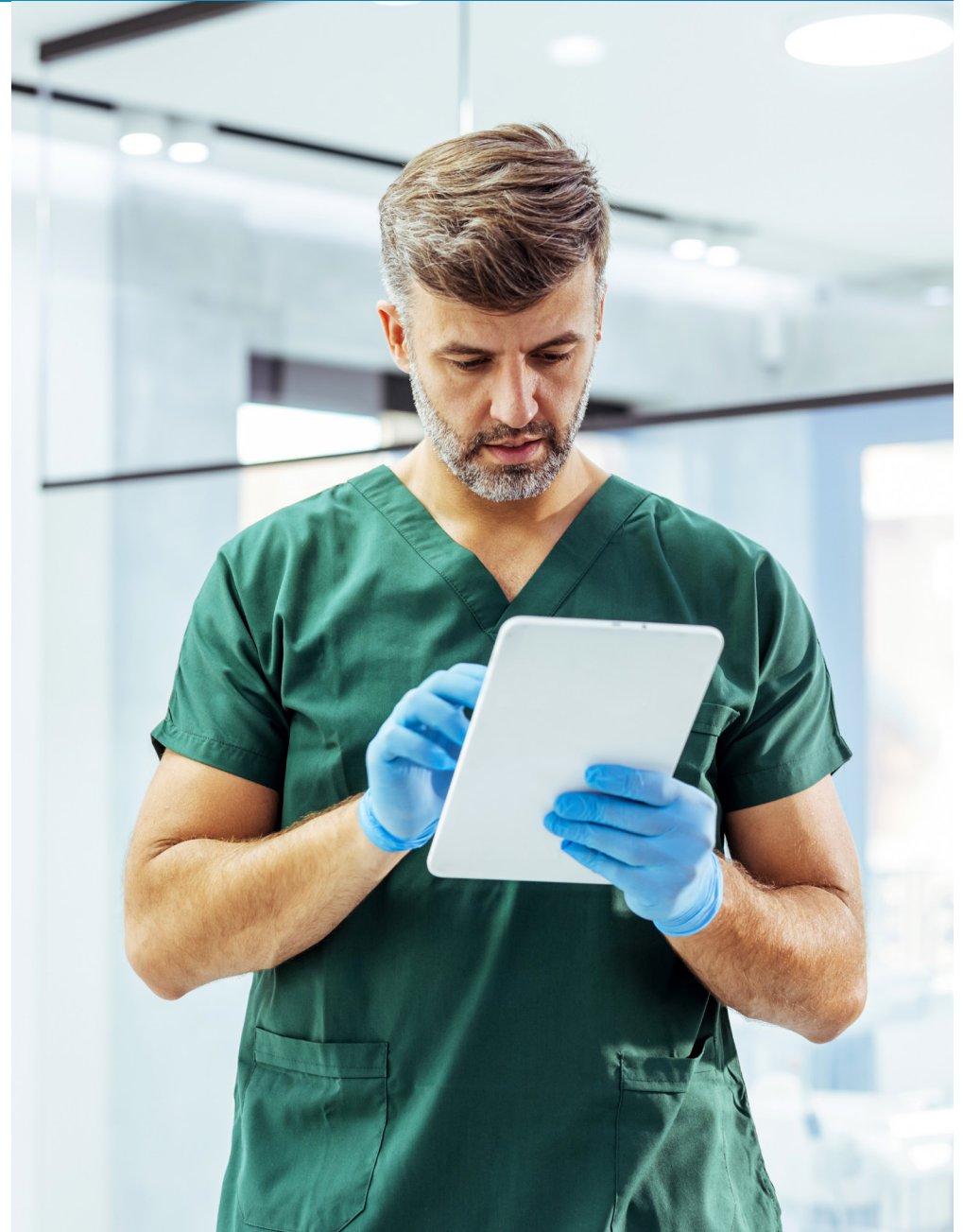
A Comprehensive Guide to Enhancing ED Operations with the Right Technology

Get Started

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Table of Contents

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Introduction | The State of Emergency Departments | The Intersection of Care | Better Decisions | Successful ED Optimization | How ED Optimization Works | Improving ED Financial Performance | Current Trends | How PointClickCare Can Help

Introduction

Emergency departments (EDs) handle over **130 million visits each year**. This gives acute care physicians less than 20 minutes, on average, for each patient encounter. With little time to collect full patient histories, and even less time to make decisions, these brief, and often isolated, encounters can put the patient at risk for suboptimal treatment and outcomes.

Having data is only the first step to optimization. While hospital electronic health records (EHRs) do offer the ability to query patient records both within the facility and other facilities on the same platform, providers must still manually piece together the puzzle of a patient's journey from various record types. But in the ED, time is at a premium —physicians and nurses need to react quickly with the best information available. They don't have time to sift through dozens of encounters or assemble fragmented data from multiple sources to fill gaps in patient history. For EDs to improve operations, they need to ensure that providers have the right data at their fingertips and can easily see what's most important first.
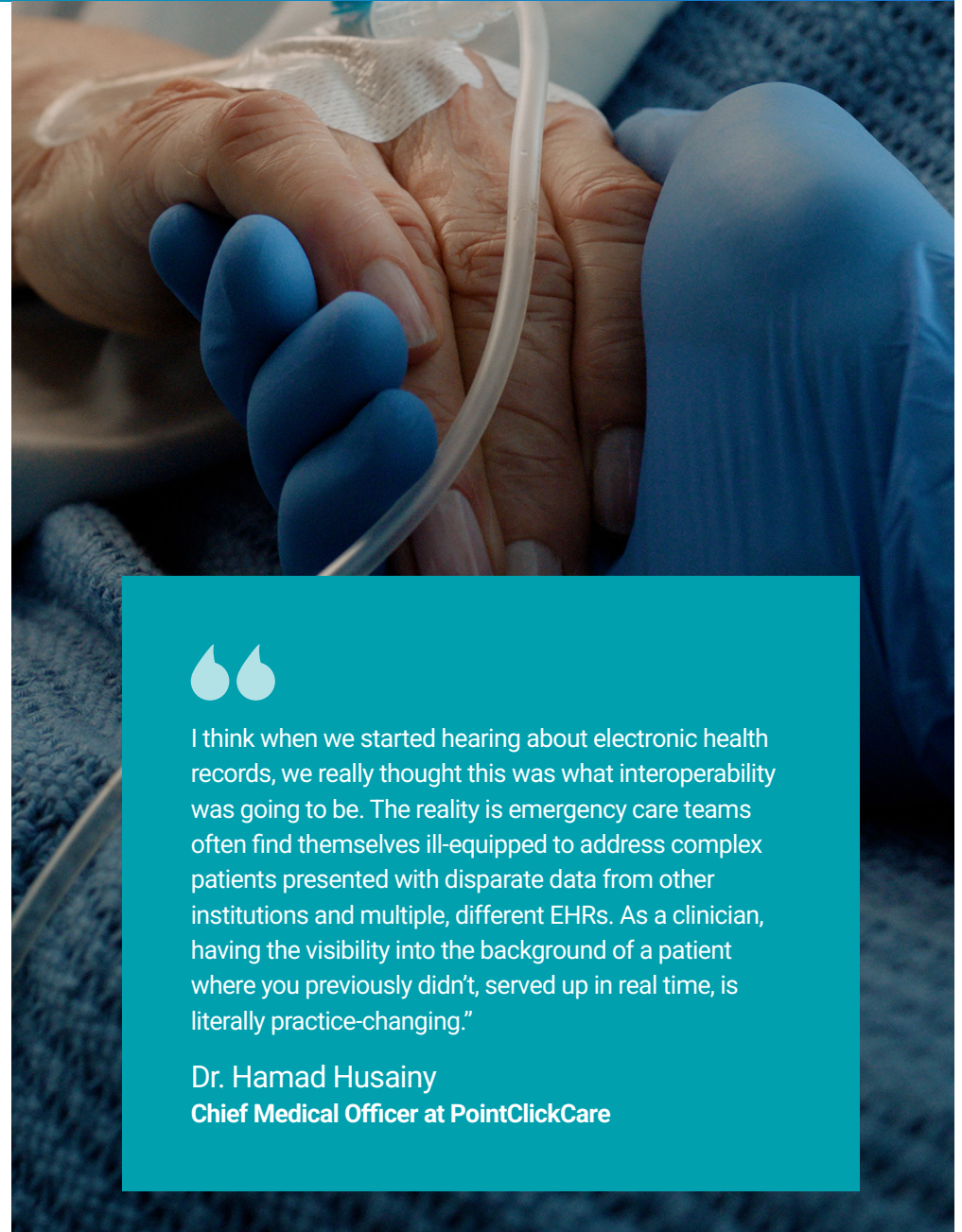
This guide examines the challenges faced by EDs and the transformative impact of coordinated care solutions. It highlights how incomplete or outdated patient information can compromise care quality, drive up costs, and create operational inefficiencies.

Through real-world examples, the guide demonstrates how optimized care coordination and data integration reduce unnecessary ED visits, enhance patient outcomes, streamline workflows, and foster collaboration between acute and post-acute care settings. Additionally, it explores the role of innovative tools, such as real-time insights and EHR integration, in enabling faster, more informed clinical decision-making while alleviating provider burden.

> "
> I think when we started hearing about electronic health records, we really thought this was what interoperability was going to be. The reality is emergency care teams often find themselves ill-equipped to address complex patients presented with disparate data from other institutions and multiple, different EHRs. As a clinician, having the visibility into the background of a patient where you previously didn't, served up in real time, is literally practice-changing."
>
> Dr. Hamad Husainy
> **Chief Medical Officer at PointClickCare**

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Introduction | **The State of Emergency Departments** | The Intersection of Care | Better Decisions | Successful ED Optimization | How ED Optimization Works | Improving ED Financial Performance | Current Trends | How PointClickCare Can Help

State of Emergency Departments Today

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Introduction | **The State of Emergency Departments** | The Intersection of Care | Better Decisions | Successful ED Optimization | How ED Optimization Works | Improving ED Financial Performance | Current Trends | How PointClickCare Can Help

State of Emergency Departments Today

EDs are a critical healthcare access point for many of the most vulnerable patients. However, once there, providers often do not have complete patient information in their EHR or must search and piece together that medical history manually. When the most up-to-date patient information isn't readily accessible, emergency care teams are forced to make do with what they have.

Incomplete or outdated clinical data can lead to premature or inadequate diagnoses, avoidable or duplicate tests, extended ED length of stay (LOS), and a higher risk of readmissions after discharge. This increases healthcare costs and causes added stress for patients and their care team.

Patient Story:
Reducing Avoidable ED Utilization by Identifying High-Risk Patients

"

We had one patient with more than 200 visits last year, and now that we have better care insights and can immediately recommend other outpatient resources, that individual has had zero ED visits this year."

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Introduction | The State of Emergency Departments | The Intersection of Care | Better Decisions | Successful ED Optimization | How ED Optimization Works | Improving ED Financial Performance | Current Trends | How PointClickCare Can Help

The Intersection of Care Coordination and ED Optimization

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Introduction | The State of Emergency Departments | **The Intersection of Care** | Better Decisions | Successful ED Optimization | How ED Optimization Works | Improving ED Financial Performance | Current Trends | How PointClickCare Can Help

The Intersection of Care Coordination and ED Optimization

In emergency settings, care coordination plays a vital role in improving patient outcomes by streamlining transitions, improving care delivery, and enhancing overall care quality. By fostering strong connections between providers, departments, and external organizations, hospitals can better meet the needs of patients while maintaining high operational standards.

A 2023 **study** by the Assistant Secretary for Technology Policy (ASTP) found that while 71% of U.S. hospitals routinely had electronic access to necessary clinical information from external providers at the point of care, only **42% of them often used that information**. Additionally, **The New England Journal of Medicine** reported that despite technological advancements, one in four hospitalized patients in the U.S. experience preventable harm. These findings underscore the importance of not only improving electronic access to patient information but also ensuring that clinicians effectively integrate this data into their workflows to enhance patient care.

> I need easy access to a patient's most recent medical history both inside and outside the system so I can quickly triage and treat."

The exchange of data across various points of care helps coordinate treatment between acute and post-acute settings. With seamless coordination across the care continuum, providers and other care team members can identify at-risk patients and share information — such as how a patient looks or behaves when their condition worsens, which treatments work best for them, and who to contact in an emergency.

ED providers can access information about the broader care team, including the patient's behavioral health providers, enabling them to collaborate on the patient's care. With access to each patient's medical history, providers can identify any patterns or trends in ED utilization, the patient's presenting complaint, and diagnosis at each encounter.

ED Doctor

> I need information about the patient's broader care team, care guidelines, and other medically necessary care from those providers, so I can coordinate post-discharge support if needed."

ED Care Manager

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Introduction | The State of Emergency Departments | The Intersection of Care | **Better Decisions** | Successful ED Optimization | How ED Optimization Works | Improving ED Financial Performance | Current Trends | How PointClickCare Can Help

Better Decisions at the Point of Care

Better Decisions at the Point of Care

The ED often serves as the front door of the hospital, including those patients transitioning from post-acute settings such as skilled nursing facilities (SNFs) or other out-of-network care. Unfortunately, the lack of complete patient histories during these transitions hampers the ability to provide high-quality, continuous care.

The fast-paced and transitory environment of emergency departments means frontline providers must have as much information as possible about a patient in order to react quickly, but their EHR may not always support that goal. Often the EHR contains little to no patient history or only fragmented information, making it difficult to quickly and easily find the necessary details.

Optimization tools delivering intelligent alerts with summarized notifications and rapid insights on high-risk, high-needs patients seconds after ED registration can improve response times and decision-making. This additional data can mitigate medical uncertainty, support swift clinical decisions at the point of care, and enable informed discharge or admit decisions. This approach also improves data sharing and reduces the workload for ED teams.

Current ED Patient Triage	Outcome	With ED Optimization	Outcome
Patient registers at the ED with limited information, ED staff must enter manually	Accessing patient history is done manually, via the EHR, phone, or history packet with patient	Patient information arrives in a summarized notification at the point of care	Within seconds of registering, ED staff receive automated summary of notifications directly in ED track board
Filtering through volumes of patient ED visit entries	Patient encounter history limited to health system records	Patient history including mental/behavioral health, SNF admit dates, facility, practitioner details, diagnoses, and medications	Equipped with critical patient information enables the care team to assess them more quickly, supporting patient and staff safety and reducing unnecessary tests or readmissions
High-risk patient admitted	ED staff and resources buried in administrative burden, underutilized for patient care	Recommend other outpatient resources for more targeted, interventional care plans	Improved continuity of care for patient, higher utilization of ED staff for commercial and Medicaid patients

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Introduction | The State of Emergency Departments | The Intersection of Care | Better Decisions | **Successful ED Optimization** | How ED Optimization Works | Improving ED Financial Performance | Current Trends | How PointClickCare Can Help

Successful ED Optimization through Care Coordination

Successful ED Optimization through Care Coordination

By addressing utilization rates and optimizing workflows, emergency departments can increase throughput, improve efficiency, and avoid preventable encounters and readmissions — ultimately saving on care costs and increasing revenue—while providing higher quality care.

Addressing Behavioral Health with Care and Compassion

Sturdy Memorial Hospital leveraged ED Optimization to gain insight on **behavioral health patients utilizing the ED**. By involving case managers in the care of their behavioral health patients, Study Memorial saw a dramatic decrease in ED utilization by behavior health patients.

Connecting Providers Statewide with Meaningful and Timely Data

"The EDCC (Emergency Department Care Coordination) program within the Commonwealth of Virginia aims to improve the quality of patient care services by connecting participating providers to each other electronically...providers can now connect statewide, enabling better insights into patient history and visit frequency. This information empowers ED staff to guide patients towards more suitable treatment options at the point-of-care, reducing unnecessary utilization. As a result, the **EDCC program has consistently achieved a 10% year-over-year reduction in utilization.**" –Kyle Russell, CEO, Virginia Health Information, VHI

Assessing Patient Need with Alternatives to Readmissions

Legacy Salmon Creek designed an emergency department readmissions algorithm around their ED optimization platform, focused on assessing patient needs and considering alternatives to readmission. **Legacy successfully reduced the overall ED encounter rate by 81%, leading to a 25% reduction in all-cause 30-day readmissions and earning the hospital an Award of Excellence in Healthcare Quality by Qualis Health.**

Improving Workplace Safety with Unified Acute and Post-Acute Care Coordination

Torrance Memorial Medical Center created unified care plans in the Ed Optimization platform utilizing an interdisciplinary team consisting of care managers, social workers, nurses and physicians. Focusing on these collaborative care plans led to preliminary results showing a **57%** **decrease in ED** utilization and helping Torrance Memorial address workplace violence concerns.

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Introduction | The State of Emergency Departments | The Intersection of Care | Better Decisions | Successful ED Optimization | **How ED Optimization Works** | Improving ED Financial Performance | Current Trends | How PointClickCare Can Help

How ED Optimization Works:
Patient Use Cases

How ED Optimization Works:
Patient Use Cases

High Utilization

Identifies patients with a history of high and potentially avoidable ED utilization to redirect or intervene with more appropriate care programs

Workplace Safety

Identifies patients who may be at risk of harm to themselves or your staff and help prevent violent behavior in the ED

Patients Returning from SNF

Delivers summarized care insights for patients transferring from a skilled nursing facility (SNF)

Readmission Risk

Identifies patients who were recently discharged from an inpatient or SNF stay

Substance Use

Identifies patients with a history of substance use disorder to ensure they are getting the most appropriate care to lessen dependency on the ED for treatment

Mental Health

Identifies patients with a history of mental health or self-harm and to redirect or intervene with more appropriate care programs

Social Determinants of Health

Identifies patients with a history of housing and other insecurities to redirect or intervene with more appropriate programs and support discharge planning

Social determinants of health influence mental health, substance use, and behavioral health conditions. Unfortunately, these conditions can often go undiagnosed or overlooked in acute settings when patients present reporting only physical symptoms. Without addressing both medical and behavioral diagnoses, patients are at higher risk for complications, readmissions, and overprescribing of pain medications that can exacerbate existing conditions.

PointClickCare®

Introduction | The State of Emergency Departments | The Intersection of Care | Better Decisions | Successful ED Optimization | How ED Optimization Works | Improving ED Financial Performance | Current Trends | How PointClickCare Can Help

Improving ED Financial Performance

Improving ED Financial Performance

Inefficient ED utilization hampers hospital operations while inflating costs. By accelerating informed clinical decision-making and increasing patient throughput, care coordination across settings can help shorten LOS and enhance performance in both fee-for-service and value-based care models. By identifying and managing patients who frequently visit the ED when alternative programs and care is available, hospitals can ensure resource availability for commercial and Medicare patients and maximize value.

"

I need oversight into patient activity and ED visit volume and trends, so I can better manage efficiency, throughput, and minimize LOS and boarding."

ED Director

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Introduction | The State of Emergency Departments | The Intersection of Care | Better Decisions | Successful ED Optimization | How ED Optimization Works | Improving ED Financial Performance | Current Trends | How PointClickCare Can Help

Current Trends in ED Optimization and Care Coordination

Current Trends in ED Optimization and Care Coordination

ED Optimization provides a more complete picture of the patient through crucial encounter history summaries and notifications, including care insights, guidelines, and plans. Essential data for ED staff is readily available and integrated into the EHR. By mapping patient data to the health system's ED track board, emergency care teams can quickly identify and access relevant records without leaving or having to search in their EHR, enhancing triage efficiency and throughput.

Automatic Identification and Notification of Vulnerable Individuals

Upon registration in the ED, intelligent analytics can automatically identify patients in need of special care and deliver notifications to front-line providers in their existing workflow. These insights can include high or rising patterns of ED utilization, histories of substance use, and mental and behavioral health conditions.

Real-Time Care Collaboration Between Care Team Members

Emerging care collaboration tools are empowering each member of the patient's care team to contribute historical care details alongside the information automatically gathered from the EHR. When a patient in need of attention is identified in the system, critical insights can now be served up on demand in the ED. This includes collaborative care insights, such as safety concerns that may not be documented in the EHR, as well as key details from care settings outside the hospital system — whether across town or across the country.

Enhancing Care Transitions: ED-SNF Collaboration

Research indicates that **33% of SNF patients face an avoidable ED visit** within 30 days of admission, costing over 52.4 billion annually. Transfers from skilled nursing facilities to the emergency department account for approximately **14 million ED visits annually**, a fifth of which may be avoidable.

As healthcare systems address the complexities of an aging population, efficient communication is becoming even more essential. Data shows that **patients over 75 comprise the second largest group in ED settings**, with a significant percentage requiring hospitalization. Emerging technologies are now facilitating the **real-time integration of critical SNF data into ED workflows**. By providing immediate access to patient histories, diagnoses, and recent medication details, these innovations support more informed clinical decisions, enhance care coordination, and contribute to safer, more efficient transitions during critical care episodes.

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Introduction | The State of Emergency Departments | The Intersection of Care | Better Decisions | Successful ED Optimization | How ED Optimization Works | Improving ED Financial Performance | Current Trends | How PointClickCare Can Help

How PointClickCare Can Help

PointClickCare®

Introduction | The State of Emergency Departments | The Intersection of Care | Better Decisions | Successful ED Optimization | How ED Optimization Works | Improving ED Financial Performance | Current Trends | How PointClickCare Can Help

How PointClickCare Can Help

PointClickCare is a leading health tech company with one simple mission: to help providers deliver exceptional care.

With the largest long-term and post-acute care dataset, we power AI-driven healthcare to deliver intelligent transitions, insightful interventions, and improved financial performance. Enhanced by our marketplace of 400+ integrated partners and trusted by over 30,000 provider organizations and every major U.S. health plan, we're redefining healthcare, so it doesn't just survive — it thrives.

PointClickCare can connect EDs to the SNFs in their area, giving them the ability to retrieve chart-level data about patient PAC stays and recent discharges, leveraging a network of facilities across the U.S. — all without leaving their EHR.

Your EHR, Just Better

Designed to seamlessly integrate into existing workflows, **ED Optimization** helps summarize and surface critical patient insights — whether they originate in your EHR or beyond it. Instead of requiring providers to search for information, we push the most relevant insights directly into your workflow. Our SMART on FHIR-enabled platform supports Epic and Cerner and integrates with other EHRs as well. For Epic and Cerner users, notifications and insights can be automatically filed into the patient's chart, where they can be viewed, authored, and edited within the EHR. By leveraging industry standards like SMART on FHIR, we enhance the secure and efficient management of patient data while reducing administrative burden.

How PointClickCare's ED Optimization Works with Epic, Cerner, and other EHR Platforms

EHR Platform	EHR with ED Optimization	Results
ED Registration intake and workflow	Provides ED staff with real-time notifications about patient history, risks, approaches to take, and precautions	Improves patient and staff safety, reduces recurring incidents of assault, streamlines access to behavioral health treatment
Only access to in-network clinical information on ED track board	Connects across technology, care settings, and the country on ED track board	Streamlines decisions, reduces staff burden
Only access to acute care data	Integrates post-acute care data to quickly identify SNF transfers and other high-need, complex patients	Optimizes utilization of ED staff for commercial and Medicaid patients, enhancing hospital performance in both fee-for-service and value-based care models
Only access to point-of-care patient data	Provides supplemental SNF transfers data to coordinate the most appropriate level of care	Helps mitigate unnecessary ED visits and can dramatically shortens ED lengths of stay
Limited visibility into patient history and encounters at other EDs	Quickly flags patients who can benefit from more targeted interventional care plans, and enables sharing of care insights	Empowers ED staff to recommend other outpatient resources and track progress, report impacts
No information in EHR flagging patient presenting in ER has an overdose or other related risk	Real-time alerts and daily report updates to prioritize time and for quicker intervention	More informed and rapid care decisions reduces administrative burden and frees up time for ED staff to focus on patient care

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| Introduction | The State of Emergency Departments | The Intersection of Care | Better Decisions | Successful ED Optimization | How ED Optimization Works | Improving ED Financial Performance | Current Trends | How PointClickCare Can Help |

Improving ED Operational Efficiency and Care Quality Through a Connected Healthcare Ecosystem

> " If you can be (notified) before admitting one patient presented who could be better cared for outside the emergency department, this tool has already paid for itself."
>
> Dr. Ronn Berrol
> **Medical Director Emergency Services, Sutter Health**
> **PointClickCare client since 2016**

To improve the continuity of care and enable the accurate and swift delivery of emergency care, we must improve data visibility across all settings, including visibility into post-acute environments. This means ensuring EDs have access to real-time data from SNFs. The integration of these insights into EHRs through ED Optimization represents a significant advancement in healthcare delivery. By facilitating data sharing across transitions of care, we support better care coordination and throughput.

PointClickCare's ED Optimization solution addresses healthcare interoperability, connecting to a health data network with more than 2,800 hospitals, 27,000 long term and post-acute care providers, and 3,600 ambulatory clinics. Discover how ED Optimization can provide a better view of patient data, empowering your emergency department staff to deliver safer, more efficient care.

Your Solution to Optimize Emergency Department Operations with Care Coordination

If you're ready to learn more about leveraging technology for real-time visibility into to critical information needed to meet time-sensitive quality measures, request a demo today.

Learn More