



News from:
COMPTROLLER KEVIN LEMBO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2015

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**COMPTROLLER LEMBO LAUNCHES FIRST IN SERIES OF
HEALTH CONSUMER AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS:
“EMERGENCY ROOMS ARE FOR EMERGENCIES”**

Comptroller Kevin Lembo this week launched the first in a series of health consumer awareness campaigns to encourage state employees, retirees – and all Connecticut residents – to shop smart for health care.

This purpose of this week’s campaign – utilizing social media, direct messages to employees and other platforms – concerns the common misuse of emergency rooms (ERs) for non-emergency care.

“The theme this week is: Emergency Rooms are for emergencies,” Lembo said. “Summer is the high-traffic season for the beach – and also for emergency rooms. While none of us *wants* to visit an ER – and we hope to never require one – many people visit ERs every year for non-emergency ailments or injuries that could be better treated in urgent care centers, physician offices and other non-emergency retail health settings.

“In many cases, patients could have saved significant time, money and frustration by avoiding ERs for non-emergency conditions. Our goal this week is to raise awareness about the benefits of avoiding ERs for non-emergency care – the first in a series of awareness campaigns over the coming months designed to encourage everyone to shop smart for health care.”

First and foremost, Lembo said he wants to be clear that health and safety is a priority – and that people should always call 911 or go to the ER if they believe there’s any chance that they are having a real emergency or that their health is at serious risk

by delaying care.

“Our goal is to arm everyone with information to ensure the best and safest possible patient experience when they suffer an injury or illness,” Lembo said.

As part of the information campaign, Lembo shared with employees and retirees two tools through Anthem and UnitedHealth (the state’s third-party administrators for the state health plan) to find the nearest urgent care center immediately:

- Anthem mobile app: Anthem’s free downloadable mobile app for iPhone and Android (users don’t need to be an Anthem customer to use it) will immediately direct patients to the nearest urgent care center based on their GPS location.
- Web Links: As an alternative to the app, these links by Anthem and UnitedHealthcare allow users to search for a convenient urgent care center in their area:
 - Anthem link: <https://www13.anthem.com/cp/web/statect/find-a-doctor>
 - UnitedHealthcare: <http://stateofct.welcometouhc.com/home>

EMERGENCY ROOMS VS. URGENT CARE: THE FACTS

- The average cost for an emergency room visit is more than \$1,200
- The average cost for an urgent care visit is \$260
- The average sick visit with a physician is \$100

The State of Connecticut employee and retiree health plan spends approximately **\$4.4 million annually** on emergency room costs. However, a recent review by Anthem reveals that approximately **50 percent** of emergency room visits were for non-emergency conditions that could have been treated in an alternate setting.

These are some of the most common conditions that could be treated in urgent care centers:

- Upper respiratory infections
- Sprained ankle or other extremity
- Urinary tract infection
- Gastrointestinal issues
- Minor injuries: sprains, back pain, minor cuts and burns, minor broken bones, or minor eye injuries
- Common illnesses: colds, the flue, earaches, sore throats, migraines, low-grade fevers and limited rashes

This link – from the U.S. National Library of Medicine – offers additional helpful tips to determine what cases warrant calling 911 and seeking ER care vs. urgent care:

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/patientinstructions/000593.htm>

WHY SHOULD PATIENTS CARE?

CONVENIENCE: Routine care – such as those described above – can often be better and more efficiently delivered in urgent care centers or other non-emergency health centers. Overcrowded ERs can result in unnecessarily longer waits.

COST: ERs are not only more expensive for the state – they are more expensive for *patients* personally! Patients pay higher copays on the state plan for ER visits, and all state plan participants pay higher premiums when ERs are utilized for non-emergent care.

IS IT AN ER OR URGENT CARE CENTER?

Some Connecticut hospitals now have smaller free-standing, off-site ERs that may appear similar to neighborhood urgent care centers. These free-standing ERs deliver ER services and charge ER rates – and may not be appropriate for non-emergent care.

Only licensed ERs can offer “emergency services.” Here are the six licensed free-standing ERs in Connecticut:

- Plainfield Emergency Center (affiliated with William W. Backus Hospital)
- Winsted Health Center (affiliated with Charlotte Hungerford Hospital)
- Pequot Health Center in Groton (affiliated with Lawrence and Memorial Hospital)
- Marlborough Medical Center (affiliated with Middlesex Hospital)
- Shoreline Medical Center of Essex (affiliated with Middlesex Hospital)
- Yale-New Haven Shoreline Medical Center of Guilford (affiliated with Yale-New Haven Hospital)

Here are descriptions of alternatives to such ERs:

- ***Urgent Care Clinics:*** Staffed with family pediatric, ER and internal medicine doctors. They treat certain conditions right away that are not as severe as emergencies.
- ***Retail Health Clinics:*** Often found in a major pharmacy or retail store. They have physician assistants and nurse practitioners on site to treat basic health concerns.
- ***Walk-in Doctors’ Offices:*** Usually family practice doctors who can treat many things even if the patient is not a regular patient or has no appointment.

SPREADING THE WORD

Lembo is encouraging all to share these facts on social media throughout the week with fellow employees, retirees and neighbors.

“This does not just affect state employees and retirees – it affects everyone in the health-care system,” Lembo said.

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