



After Hours and Weekend Healthcare

Do you know where to go and what to do?

Commentary by Maj. Melissa Thomas, Chief of Clinical Operations,
Evans Army Community Hospital

The ideal place to receive health care is your Patient Centered Medical Home with your primary care manager or PCM, but we all know, people do not just get ill or injured Monday through Friday during normal, medical clinic hours. At Evans Army Community Hospital we understand this and try to meet your needs.

Your PCM should be the person you seek health care from, as they can focus on your long-term health and are able to assess and treat your total health needs. They can treat the symptoms you are experiencing now, as well as monitor chronic conditions, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease, to help you live life fully.

However, what should you do during the times that medical clinics are not open? For urgent needs, there are a few options.

First, if you or your family member needs emergency care you need to call 911 or go to the nearest emergency care facility. An emergency is a sudden, unexpected medical condition that would endanger a person's life or seriously harm the person's health if not treated immediately by a licensed medical professional (an immediate threat to loss of life, limb, or eye sight). You may go to any hospital in your area for emergency care. Some examples of emergency medical conditions include: extreme shortness of breath, chest pain, mental status change, trauma, or feelings of wanting to hurt yourself or others.

There are other types of conditions that may occur after hours that may require prompt attention, but are not life-threatening. For these urgent health care situations your first option is to call the TRICARE Nurse Advice Line by dialing the local access to care line (524-CARE/2273) and selecting option 3. The nationwide Nurse Advice Line (NAL) is a new TRICARE service offered to beneficiaries with 24/7 access to a nurse who can provide home health care advice or determine if you need to go to the Evans

hospital Emergency Department. When beneficiaries call the NAL, representatives first check their eligibility in the Defense Enrollment and Eligibility Reporting System or DEERs. Beneficiaries then speak to registered nurses who ask a series of standard questions to recommend the next steps and provide the best advice possible. The NAL also has pediatric nurses to answer children's health questions. If follow-up to a child's care is needed or requested, the nurses will call back to check on them a few hours later. The NAL representatives can also make appointments at military hospitals and clinics for TRICARE Prime beneficiaries enrolled to those facilities.

Beneficiaries who feel they need to be seen by a healthcare professional after hours or on weekends and holidays and the condition is not a life-threatening emergency, besides calling the NAL, can seek care at the Evans hospital Emergency Room. They should not go to off-post urgent care centers or stand-alone Emergency Rooms. A new Evans hospital policy restricts providers from authorizing urgent care referrals for after-hours care, unless the beneficiary is out of area. This will help ensure beneficiaries receive consistent advice and will keep them from incurring point-of-service charges.

You may have noticed several stand-alone "Emergency Rooms" or care centers in the Colorado Springs region. These facilities are not TRICARE-covered options. If you choose to go there, you may receive a bill that TRICARE will not cover or be asked to pay out of pocket up front. The Evans hospital Emergency Department is staffed with both emergency physicians as well as physician assistants who provide an urgent care option to speed up the wait times for less urgent concerns.

When beneficiaries seek care at emergency departments outside the direct care system, it costs military medicine a significant amount of money. Beneficiaries in our region who seek non-emergent care at downtown Emergency Rooms cost the government almost \$2 million per year! Those funds could be used for additional health care in our military treatment facilities to offer you more services. In addition, your patient documentation may be delayed getting to your primary care providers if you go to a non-network care center. Being seen at the Evans hospital Emergency Room ensures that your health care is documented in your electronic medical record and your regular provider has access to the information.

Finally, if you think you can wait until the next business day to be seen, remember that you can book an appointment with your primary care manager or the PCM team as early as 3 p.m. the day prior on TRICARE Online. Sign up for an account at www.tricareonline.com and you will have access to make appointments as well as request prescription refills and even view laboratory results. To book same day appointments call (719) 524-CARE (2273) / (866) 422-7391. The phone lines are available Monday-Friday from 6 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.