

THE TRIAGE PROCESS – WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

WHAT IS TRIAGE? WHAT DOES MY TRIAGE COLOUR MEAN?

Triage is a process of assigning priority to patients in Emergency Units, based on measurement of certain signs in the patient and the presence of key facts in the history. A Triage nurse will see you and go through a short examination with you – this is the triage process, and at the end of this your symptoms and measurements will assign you into one of FOUR groups. These four groups are Red, Orange, Yellow and Green. More detail on these groups is provided below.

WHY AM I BEING TRIAGED?

We have had many problems before where patients have arrived at the Unit very sick, but nobody has noticed this because they were waiting in the queue to be seen in “their turn”. This can make patients much sicker by the time the doctor sees them: rarely, patients have died as a result. Triage avoids this: by making an assessment of everyone arriving in the Unit and assigning a priority to them, the sickest patients get to be seen first, as is right.

WHY ARE PEOPLE WHO ARRIVED AFTER ME BEING SEEN BEFORE ME?

Unfortunately, when sick patients arrive and they are identified by the triage process, it means that those who are less sick have to wait a bit longer to be seen. Remember, it is your symptoms and measurements (heart rate, blood pressure and so on) that have made you the triage priority that you are. Other patients may be seen before you as they are much sicker.

Red patients are those who need to be seen immediately, otherwise they may die. Orange patients can wait a few minutes longer, but are also very sick. Yellow patients are those who are ill but can wait a bit longer – say up to 2 or 4 hours. Green patients are those with minor problems. Often these need to be seen in the Emergency Unit, but some may be better seen in a clinic or by a Family Doctor.

WHEN WILL I BE SEEN?

A doctor will see you as soon as possible. If you are waiting, it is because the staff are busy with sicker patients: we ask you please to understand this and be patient. Not all patients need to see doctors. In some centres, we are trying to introduce new means of seeing those patients who have been triaged Green. This may mean that you are seen at triage by a doctor and sent for simple tests. In other places this may involve being seen by a nurse practitioner.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE UNHAPPY

Speak to the staff at the Unit if you feel that you have been triaged wrong or you are unhappy with how long you need to wait. Remember though that triage is a scientifically tested process and is likely to have assigned the correct colour to you. Also remember that the more patients the staff have to speak with in the waiting room, the longer it will take them to treat patients. If you are still not happy, you can write to the Facility Manager / Medical Superintendent with your complaint. The staff will be able to provide you with details.