



## **Module 8: Access to Health Services**

### Part 4: Timelines

A third component of access to healthcare, under Healthy People 2020, is timeliness and it's again part of the definition of access to care. By timeliness we realize that it can be a major factor in morbidity or mortality. The obvious situations are like a car accident where maybe suddenly you have numbness on one side of your body and it might be evidence of a stroke and evolution. In these situations minutes, really, literally, matter.

What about having lumps maybe on your breasts or in your abdomen, is it benign or malignant? What about abnormal lab tests? What's the timeliness we need in order to make sure we can get appropriate diagnosis and treatment? These are all important factors that can and do impact on morbidity or mortality. And the length of time that people wait for these services is a key factor.

So, from the moment that you actually first feel symptoms to the time that you can actually make an appointment, to the time that you actually visit your primary care provider all that is an important aspect to timeliness.

And then once you see the healthcare provider do they actually provide an appropriate diagnosis, refer you to your appropriate treatment or rehabilitation? Those are important factors for improving your access to healthcare services. If in fact, we do not provide timely services as an outpatient basis or an inpatient basis then people end up choosing to go to an emergency room for their care which is the most expensive way for getting healthcare services.

If you look at America compared to other countries you can see, in terms of wait times for more than four months for elective surgery by country, that the United States does pretty well. We organize our healthcare system in a way in which people are able to get fairly timely services, certainly compared to other countries. But we're not unique in that. Other countries like France, Germany, Netherlands are equally able to get timely services within four months for elective surgery.

If we look at actually getting a specialty appointment within four weeks, again America does pretty well. Partly because we have so many specialists in our country, so one of the advantages that we have is our ability to get more timely services for specialty care.

We don't always do as well maybe for primary care services. Here's a slide looking at our city health centers here in Philadelphia, where we can see that the average wait time could be as long as two months to see a primary care provider, but at one of the health centers the wait time was as long as eight months. And you can imagine that that's a significant and serious problem in terms of timeliness of services.

So, this brings us to another one of our Healthy People 2020 goals, which is to reduce the proportion who are unable or delayed in obtaining necessary care. Our 2020 goal is that only 9% of Americans have delay in their ability to get necessary care. And we also have a developmental goal of reducing the proportion of hospital E.R. visits where the wait



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time exceeds the recommended timeframe. So, we do have a significant effort to try to reduce unnecessary delay in getting timely care.

One of the interesting things if you look at the triage of E.R. patients in America, you see that most people, the majority of people, do use the emergency room for urgent and emergent and immediate care services. But close to 40% of Americans use the E.R. for semi-urgent and even 7% use it for non urgent care. These are things that could be done ideally as an outpatient basis and we can do a lot better job of trying to divert people from emergency rooms into more ambulatory care settings if we can provide timely, quality care as an outpatient.