

Easternmost Patients Underserved No More



By Christopher Gangemi

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Stony Brook Hospital's East Hampton Emergency Department on Pantigo Road has been in operation for 14 months now, and nearly 14,000 patients have entered its doors, with more coming all the time. Dr. William Wertheim, executive vice president of Stony Brook Medicine, told the town board on Tuesday that the building has seen a 13-percent increase in patients this year.

"Patient volumes have grown steadily as residents and visitors to the East Hampton area have gotten familiar with our offerings," he said. "We started off strong, and we've just gotten stronger. It looks to us like we have a sustained demand for local emergency services."

Stony Brook had expected overall emergency-room visits between its East Hampton complex and Southampton Hospital to be flat, he said, but that is not the case.

"Our total emergency department volume has grown by 14 percent. The acuity [a measurement of the severity of complaints] is the same. What does this say to us? This says there was a significant unmet need for emergency medical care on the South Fork, and that many people were simply going without care."

Roughly 80 percent of patients arrive at the Pantigo Road center having driven there themselves or been taken by a relative, but 1,691 people have been delivered by local ambulances. That number represents an underserved need: Before East Hampton's full-service emergency building was constructed, those patients would have had to drive at least another 30 minutes to Southampton.

That helps patients, but it also helps ambulance volunteers.

"E.M.S. have been great partners in this endeavor, and they've really incorporated the emergency department into their system," said Dr. Wertheim. "I think this reflects a very efficiently run and important service for the community."

"I knew things were going well when, in Sag Harbor, I was talking to people and they were telling me how great this facility was," said New York State Assemblyman Tommy John Schiavoni, speaking to the town board from the podium. "People were actually coming east from Sag Harbor and Bridgehampton to come to the facility here in East Hampton. The numbers bear it out—and I can tell you what's not happening. We're not hearing the ambulances come from East Hampton through Wainscott, through Bridgehampton, through Water Mill, going to Southampton."

"That means faster service, better service," he added. "It's also time for our first responders that they could spend with their families and actually be on call in their communities."

Town Councilman David Lys said the new facility was discussed at last month's Montauk Citizens Advisory Committee meeting, and that there was an "audible gasp in the room" when members heard how many patients had been served.

"These numbers show we needed it even more than we realized," agreed Councilman Ian Calder-Piedmonte.

What is important is that these patients are also seen quickly. This isn't the emergency waiting room depicted on "The Pitt." From door to triage, patients are seen in 11 minutes; from door to provider, 24.6 minutes. The average length of stay, including treatment and release, is just over two hours -- 138 minutes.

"These are exceptionally strong metrics for an emergency department, especially a new one," said Dr. Wertheim. "We don't want people with urgent and emergent problems to have to wait."

The average daily volume is 32.7 patients a day. August 2025 saw a record of 1,706 patients.

Patients are arriving from all over the East End, especially East Hampton, but also a large number from Montauk and Springs. "This is a regional resource, not simply a local facility," said Dr. Wertheim. He noted as well that Stony Brook Medicine is now providing behavioral health services in local schools, with psychologists, social workers, and psychiatrists available mostly through tele-health. "One of the silver linings to the COVID pandemic," he said.

The glowing review of the emergency room's first year here even spilled over to the next topic the board tackled, about the history and mission of the Ellen Hermanson Foundation, which supports breast cancer education and will host its annual 5K race on Aug. 16.

Mady Schuman, the foundation's executive director, said she's been worried over the years "about getting to the hospital, God forbid something happened to me, a guest, a parent or friend, in the summer. Now I know I'm five minutes away from a fantastic facility."