

Article

Lifeline Magazine

LIFE IN THE ER

“You take care of them, enter their lives... and then they move on.”

There's a new look to the Emergency Room at Grady Memorial Hospital. Following extensive renovation, a new, state-of-the-art ER facility is taking shape. There's more space, and more privacy. There's now a clearer separation between the activities of the Emergency Room and Urgent Care. And there's a brighter look, with colors that suggest energy, vitality — life.

Life and death struggles are a way of life in an emergency room. It's a day-in, day-out, high-stakes drama full of emotion, where people in crisis come and go—and are rarely heard from again. It's the one area of Grady Memorial Hospital that people probably know least about. The head nurse at the Grady Emergency Room is Barb Martin, an ER specialist for 18 years. Why so many years in such a high-pressure job? “It's fascinating,” she explains. “I like meeting different people with various backgrounds. “You have to know a little bit about everything, and be prepared for anything that comes through the door.” “Anything” means all ages (from newborn babies to patients well into their 90s), and all kinds of predicaments, from alligator bites to cardiac arrest to a man with a motor stuck to his hand. According to Barb, “It's always amazed



Emergency Room & Urgent Care

Barbara Martin, R.N., Head Nurse Emergency Department

me what people can get themselves into. We've treated truck drivers, Super Bowl winners, wrestlers, and lots of vacationers who just happen to be traveling through Delaware. We've seen people from all over the world in this ER.” One characteristic of life in the ER is that it is the most transitional part of the hospital. There's no time for lasting relationships to develop between the patient and nurse. Once patients are stabilized, they either go home or to another area of the hospital for recuperation. As a result, “People hardly ever remember ER,” Barb says. “A trip to the ER is crisis time. The adrenalin's flowing and emotions are at their peak. Afterwards, people just don't remember.” Despite the transient nature of the Emergency Room, Barb explains that, generally, “ER nurses are real emotional,” even though “they

have to get tough on the outside. “Often we don't show our true feelings because we're caught up in the technical aspects of caring for patients, like hanging an IV, putting on dressings, or just assessing a case. We feel. And we care. But out of necessity, we often cut ourselves off from those feelings. We do the job, and then go on to the next patient. “The people working in the ER at Grady are really very tender-hearted, or they wouldn't be doing what they're doing. We think of it as neighbors taking care of neighbors. We're real sensitive to people's needs. “It's important for us to be reassuring, comforting.” That attitude extends beyond the patients to their families. “The hardest job in ER,” according to Barb, “belongs to the family that has to sit and wait. Often the family is very emotional, and sometimes difficult to reason with. That's understandable. “There are times when we're working so hard to help the patient that we simply can't keep the family as informed as they would like. These people don't know me when they come in, and I've got the loved one they want to be with but can't. It can be a very tense situation.” And one that Barb understands from the family's perspective: “I

LIFE IN THE ER

“You take care of them, enter their lives ... and then they move on.”

Barbara Martin, R.N. Head Nurse Emergency Department

There's a new look to the Emergency Room at Grady Memorial Hospital. Following extensive renovation, a new, state-of-the-art ER facility is taking shape.

There's more space, and more privacy. There's now a clearer separation between the activities of the Emergency Room and Urgent Care.

And there's a brighter look, with colors that suggest energy, vitality – life.

Life and death struggles are a way of life in an emergency room. It's a day-in, day-out high stakes drama full of emotion, where people in crisis come and go—and are rarely heard from again.

It's the one area of Grady Memorial Hospital that people probably know least about.

The head nurse at the Grady Memorial Emergency Room is Barb Martin, an ER specialist for 18 years. Why so many years in such a high-pressure job? “It's fascinating,” she explains. “I like meeting different people with various backgrounds.

“You have to know a little bit about everything, and be prepared for anything that comes through the door.”

“Anything” means all ages (from newborn babies to patients well into their 90s), and all kinds of predicaments, from alligator bites to cardiac arrest to a man with a motor stuck to his hand. According to Barb, “It's always amazed me what people get themselves into. We've treated truck drivers, Super Bowl winners, wrestlers and lots of vacationers who just happen to be traveling through Delaware. We've seen people from all over the world in this ER.”

One characteristic of life in the ER is that it is the most transitional part of the hospital. There's no time for lasting relationships to develop between the patient and nurse. Once patients are stabilized, they either go home or go to another area of the hospital for recuperation.

As a result, "People hardly ever remember ER," Barb says. "A trip to the ER is crisis time. The adrenalin's flowing and emotions are at their peak. Afterwards, people just don't remember."

Despite the transient nature of the Emergency Room, Barb explains that, generally, "ER nurses are real emotional," even though "they have to get tough on the outside."



"Often we don't show our real feelings because we are caught up in the technical aspects of caring for patients, like hanging an IV, putting on dressings, or just assessing a case. We feel. And we care. But out of necessity, we often cut ourselves off from those feelings. We 'do the job,' and then go on to the next patient.

"The people working in the ER at Grady are really very tender-hearted, or they wouldn't be doing what they're doing. We think of it as neighbors taking care of neighbors. We're real sensitive to people's needs.

"It's important for us to be reassuring, comforting."

That attitude extends beyond the patients to their families. "The hardest job in ER," according to Barb, "belongs to the family that has to sit and wait. Often the family is very emotional, and sometimes difficult to reason with. That's understandable.

"There are times when we're working so hard to help the patient that we simply can't keep the family as informed as they would like. These people don't know me when they come in, and I've got the loved ones they want to be with but can't. It can be a very tense situation."

And one that Barb understands from the family's perspective: "I had to bring my son to the ER once, and I was the one who had to wait. It makes you humble.

"When we get patients whom we know are just too far along to be saved, we make it a point to give the family regular reports so they'll be prepared. But when I have to tell them that we've done all that can be done ... well, it just tears me up sometimes, and I cry with them.

"Sometimes it gets tough. Real tough."

Fortunately, the vast majority of cases that pass through the Grady Emergency Room find a happy ending. Last year, over 16,000 patients were treated.

"You do whatever has to be done for the benefit of the patient," Barb adds. "You take care of them, enter their lives and hopefully make them better, and then they move on."