

Emergencies Still Happen In A Pandemic

How to address patient fears in the ER

VOLUME 1

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EMERGENCY
DESIGN
COLLECTIVE



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01.

What Is The EDC?

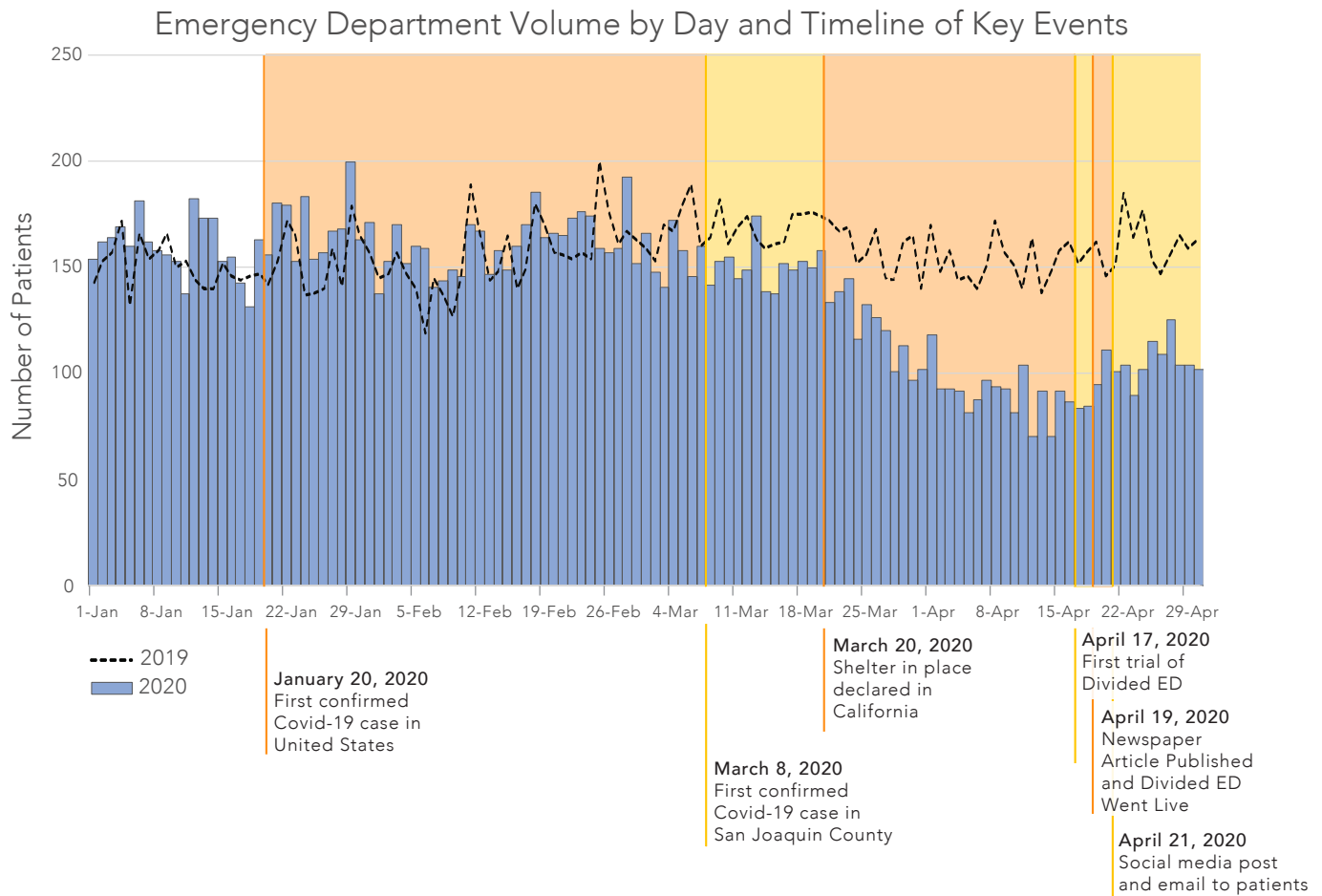
The Emergency Design Collective (EDC) is a cross-organizational, cross-disciplinary, cross-border effort of design leadership across consultancies, innovation labs, hospitals, health systems, and cohorts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made clear the urgent need for a collective of designers and innovators uniquely skilled in solving abstract challenges rapidly, tangibly, and collaboratively. Our goal is to generate solutions that can be immediately helpful and implemented by people, patients, and healthcare providers as we find new ways of working, caring for others and accessing critical tools.

02. Unforeseen Public Health Issues Emerging From Covid-19

Patients Avoiding Emergency Care

Emergency department volume is down nearly 50% as the country struggles with the Covid-19 epidemic. There is increasing evidence that patients with medical emergencies are avoiding the emergency department because of fear of contracting Covid-19, leading to increased morbidity and mortality.



Data from Adventist Health Lodi Memorial Emergency Department.
Reprinted with permission from Wong et al. NEJM Catalyst Innovations in Care Delivery, 2020.

03.

Purpose Of This Manual

Disseminating trustworthy information to the public

Leaders at a 150-bed community hospital in California partnered with a collective of Human-Centered Designers to rapidly address a sudden drop in emergency department visits after a state-wide stay-at-home order was issued. The initiative developed targeted messaging to assuage patient fears about safety and remind patients not to ignore heart and stroke symptoms.

This initiative has established reliable channels and effective methods to boost communication between hospitals, healthcare providers, and the general public beyond the normal scope of mainstream media. Here, we share the strategies that worked in our setting so that others can benefit from our experience.

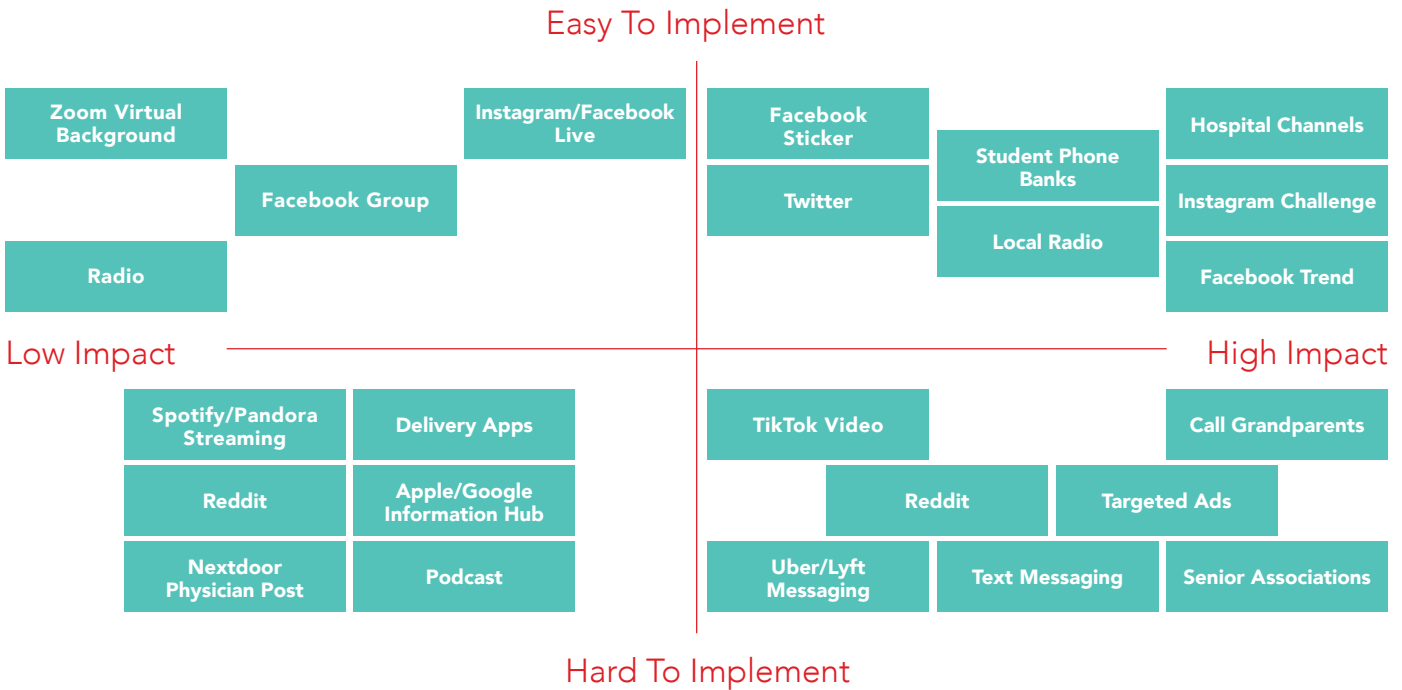
Recommendations based on the following insights:

- Hospital emergency departments are seeing reduced numbers of patients with non-COVID19 related diagnoses while first responders observe increased numbers in the field.
- Individuals experiencing non-COVID19 afflictions are less likely to go to the emergency department due to fear of contracting coronavirus.
- The general public is concerned about images being portrayed by mainstream media and are discouraged to go to the emergency room by social media campaigns telling people to stay at home.
- Individuals do not know what constitutes an emergency and warrants a trip to the hospital during the COVID19 outbreak.
- Individuals would be more likely to go to the hospital if they were aware of what precautionary measures were being implemented and knew it was acceptable to go.

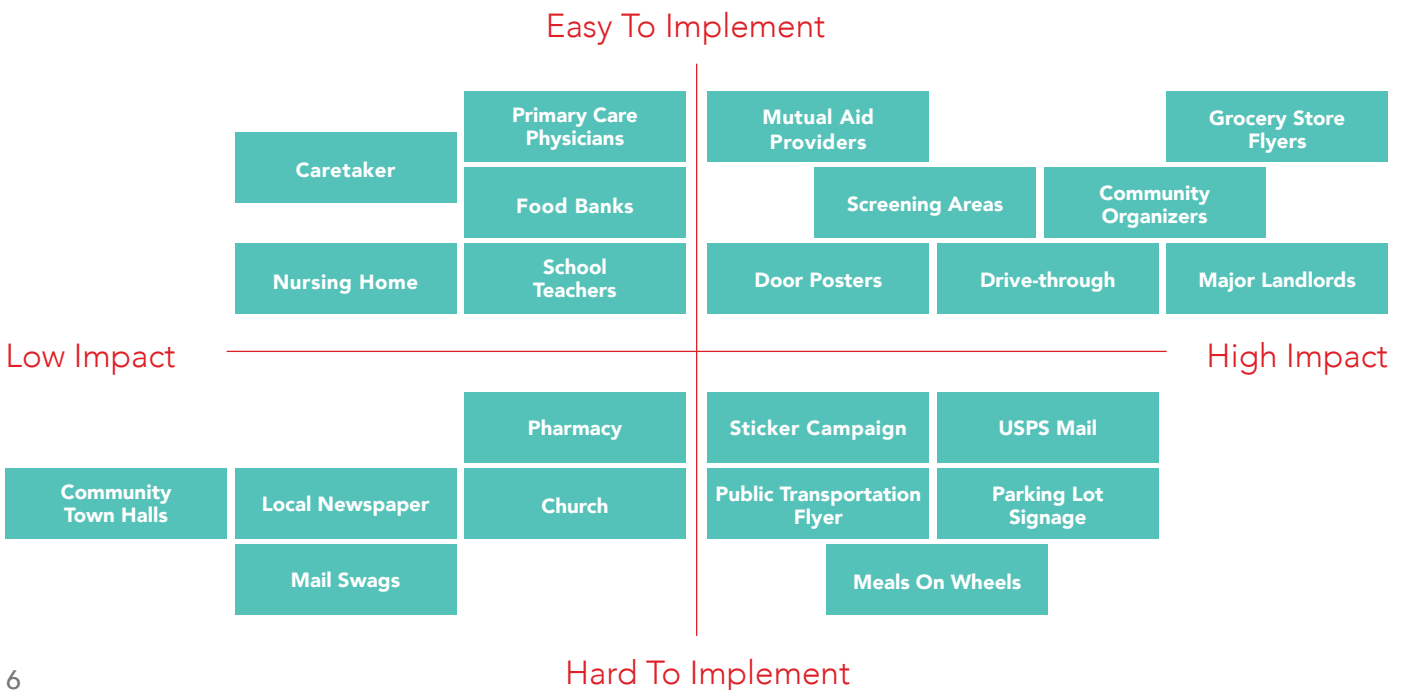
03. Purpose Of This Manual

The following page charts the impact and implementation difficulty of online and offline communication outlets.

How Might We Reach The Most People Online?



How Might We Reach The Most People Offline?



04.

Dividing The ED

Create a physical divide to create an emotional divide

Patients indicated that they saw the hospital as an infectious reservoir. Dividing the ED and visibly cohorting respiratory and non-respiratory patients will make individuals more comfortable coming to the ED.

While every clinical site is different, here are some universal steps to divide the space and the way we handled challenges that arose.

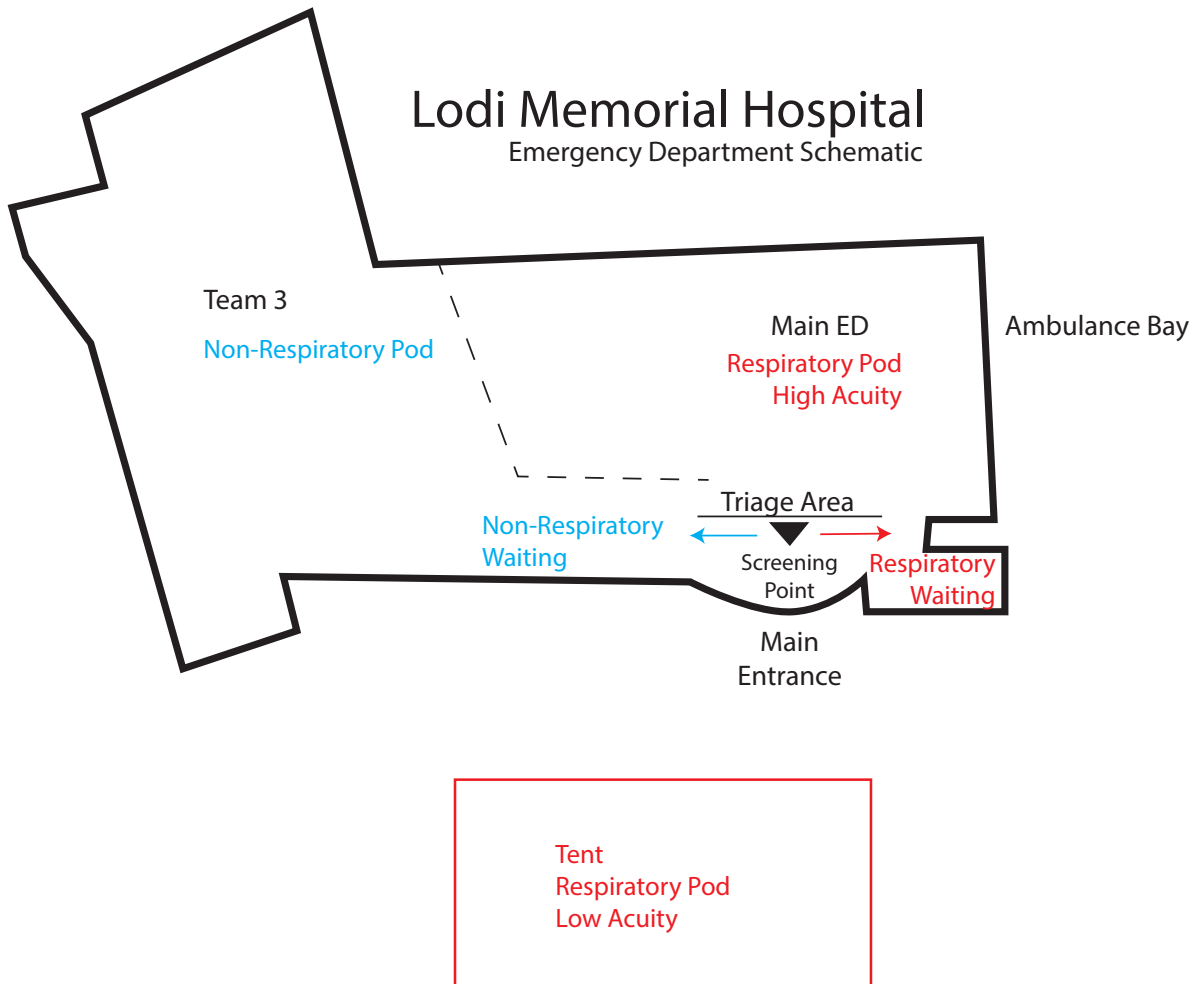
- Develop a system to triage, screen and separate patients. This is likely already in place at your hospital. Take advantage of your normal space to cohort patients.
- Create a system for rapidly moving patients who develop symptoms while on the non-respiratory side. Coordinate with environmental services to arrange for rapid and thorough room cleaning once a patient is moved.
- Divide staff and providers when possible. Staffing shortages made this challenging at certain times like overnight. Create a protocol for handwashing, PPE changes, etc. when staff and providers must cross sides.
- Have separate equipment where possible for each side. This is not possible with every piece of equipment so any equipment that crosses sides needs to be wiped down with sanitizing wipes.
- Provide masks, hand sanitizer and sanitizing wipes to patients. Patients and providers need to feel safe and PPE is a large part of this. It should be mandated to all patients and providers on both sides.

04. Dividing the ED

Provided is an example of how ED division can be implemented.

Lodi Memorial Hospital Emergency Department Schematic

The ED was divided into Respiratory and Non-Respiratory Pods with physically separate waiting areas and treatment rooms. Providers, staff and equipment were kept separate when possible. While the main entrance screening point is relatively small, questions surrounding symptoms and taking a temperature were rapid enough that maintaining social distance was not a problem during implementation.



Source: Wong et al. *NEJM Catalyst Innovations in Care Delivery*, 2020.

05. General Message to Disseminate

Spread this message throughout your communication channels

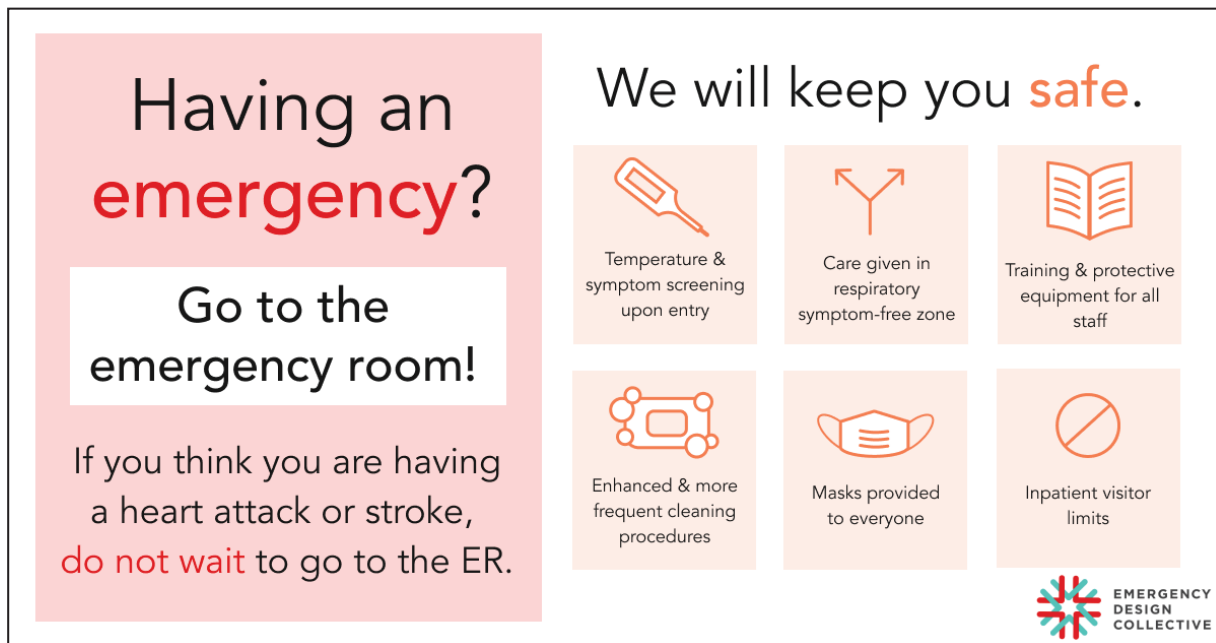
If you believe you or a loved one are having an emergency, go the emergency room. Hospitals are taking an immense amount of precautions to keep you safe including screening all visitors for COVID19 symptoms, providing an alternative entrance for non-respiratory symptoms, providing masks to all visitors, and maintaining a strict cleaning schedule to keep the hospital sanitary.

06. Recommended Channels

We recommend using the following channels to reach the most community members

Flyer Campaign

Provided is an example of a flyer with simple messaging from the ED. This flyer is available for use and inclusion of hospital branding.



Source: Wong et al. *NEJM Catalyst Innovations in Care Delivery*, 2020.

Distribution: Utilize volunteers to distribute/post at grocery stores, banks, screening locations, pharmacies, and other essential businesses

Audience: Reaches all demographic groups and is low-cost

Suggestions: Make the flyer easily translatable to include other languages

06. Recommended Channels

Hospital Website Post & Email Blast

Use messaging found on page 9 or other content that is appropriate.

Distribution: Comes directly from trusted source

Audience: individuals who have previously been patients and may be higher risk

Local Radio Public Service Announcement

Distribution: Partner with local radio stations for no/reduced cost airtime to broadcast regionally

Audience: Local community members listening to public radio or local news

Read by: News anchors, radio DJs, announcers on commercials

30 second sample script:

*A message from your healthcare providers at [\[insert hospital center here\]](#):
Heart attacks and strokes can still happen during a pandemic. We are seeing increases in severe disability and even death because people are staying at home during medical emergencies.*

Signs of a serious medical emergency can include chest pain, sudden dizziness, face drooping, or arm weakness. If you experience these symptoms, seek medical care immediately.

[\[hospital name\]](#) is keeping you safe:

*[\[add or subtract what precautions the hospital is using\]](#)
If you do not have respiratory symptoms, you will come in through a separate entrance. Everyone's temperature is taken at the door, including the staff.
Everyone who enters the building is given a mask. All of our providers also wear masks.*

If you think you or your loved one might be having an emergency, come to the emergency room.

*[\[hospital name\]](#) is open 24 hours a day at [\[location of emergency room\]](#).
We are here for you.*

06. Recommended Channels

Provider Answering Machines

Ask providers to update the default answering machine to include COVID-19 inquiries. Provided is a messaging template.

If you are having an emergency, hang up and call 911. EMS and the providers in the emergency room are available for Coronavirus and non-coronavirus emergencies. We are working hard to protect you from infectious risk.

Distribution: Message comes directly from trusted source

Audience: Encourages people actively seeking help to go to hospital to address problem

Suggestions: An alternative may be to use an email signature or patient portal message signature. Template for the signature:

If you are having an emergency, go directly to the ER or call 911. Emergency providers have put measures in place to protect you from infectious risk including enhanced cleaning, masks, and separate areas for respiratory and non-respiratory patients.

Facebook/Instagram Campaign

- Encourage individuals to use stickers on their social media profiles to advertise open emergency departments. An example is featured on the right.
- Utilize hospital Facebook page to make posts encouraging the public to go to the emergency room if needed
- If financially feasible, use Facebook advertisements to target populations regionally
- Post to hospital Facebook and/or Instagram pages



07.

Other Channels

Other channel options categorized by delivery method, listed in anticipated order of ease of implementation and community impact

Flyer Distribution

- Provide handouts to local landlords to distribute to residents
- Contact food delivery companies to include handouts with each order
- Coordinate with USPS to distribute handouts
- Post handouts on public transportation
- Consider talking to you local Meals on Wheels chapter, or a similar organization, to include handouts with each delivery

Social Media

- Create a viral Instagram challenge
- Use Twitter hashtags
- Coordinate an Instagram/Facebook live Q&A with a hospital provider
- Choreograph a TikTok dance
- Design a Zoom virtual background advertising emergency departments
- Start a Reddit Ask Me Anything(AMA) thread with an emergency room provider
- Provide information for influencers to post
- Have recognized podcasts doing a brief spot talking about emergency departments
- Post on Nextdoor

07. Other Channels

Grassroots Partnerships

- Create university/local medical school student phone banks to call local residents en masse
- Use teachers to distribute information to students
- Use church leaders to distribute information to congregations

Corporate

- Reach out to AARP to distribute information to older individuals
- Work with rideshare companies to post message on app letting people know hospital emergency rooms are open
- Partner with cell service companies to disseminate mass text
- Utilize fitness companies to provide information at the end of virtual classes
- Leverage your contacts to reach out to more people

08.

Brainstorm Your Own Ideas

This is not a comprehensive list of messaging channels for hospitals, and there are other forms of communication that may be effective. Therefore it is encouraged to set up a brainstorming session on other channels for ED communication that suit the hospitals unique circumstances. Provided are some suggestions on how to develop ideas for communication strategies.

- Ask patients where they receive information from
- Develop a survey to send out to patients about how to best communicate with them

Our research demonstrated that the public perception of the hospital has changed from a place of safety to one of danger and fear during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the future, we may find that these fears persist. Medical emergencies still happen during a pandemic and patients still require care in our emergency departments, hospitals and clinics. We need to create systems to make patients, staff and providers safe, and then communicate those safety measures to patients so they come in. Here, we have shared the results of interviews, brainstorming, and prototypes. We hope our actionable opportunities to improve the perception of risk in the emergency department help all our hospitals to continue to care for patients and communities as they did before this crisis.

Questions? Please get in touch.

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