

Is the ED volunteer role for you?

The Emergency Department (ED) is a demanding, fast-paced environment where the staff are always busy and rarely have sufficient time to direct or oversee volunteers. Therefore, the ability to work independently, without supervision, is absolutely critical.

Volunteers who thrive in this role need to be very practical, to easily see what needs to be done to complement the work of the wider ED team and not mind 'rolling their sleeves up' to get a job done where they can. They will need the ability to quickly change the direction of work to meet the varying demands on their time during the shift, but to remain positive, enthusiastic, approachable, dependable and, most importantly, to remain calm and composed no matter what the situation.

In order to enjoy this role, a volunteer should ideally have a caring, sympathetic, sensitive manner and a non-judgmental approach. Good listening and talking skills are critical and volunteers should genuinely enjoy talking and spending time with patients in ED, who are often there on their own and simply need the reassurance of talking to someone who has the patience and the time to talk.

It is expected that most of a volunteer's time will be spent between Majors A and Majors B departments, where there is constant flux of patients and need for Volunteer support; a lesser amount of time is spent in Resus, the Urgent Treatment Centre, reception and paediatric ED departments.

Key duties

It is important to note that this list of duties gives a general indication of where and how ED volunteers spend most of their time, but it is expected that you will be very flexible in your approach. Basically, where you see a job needs to be done, it is expected that you do it without the need for direction from the ED staff.

- Talking to patients and spending time with them, especially those who are there on their own or who have spent a considerable amount of time in ED already.
- Checking if patients require anything additional for comfort (eg, blanket/pillow, bed position)
- Referring any patient concerns to a nurse (eg, need for toileting)
- Serving refreshments (tea/coffee/water/sandwiches) and replenishing water jugs, cups from the water fountain (checking with nurse in charge to see if there is any patient that is nil by mouth or not suitable to attend to)
- Tidying bed spaces in support of the cleaning team
- Helping visitors to find their family member or friend
- Replenishing supplies in the Majors A and B department cupboards that contain fresh gowns, sheets, blankets, pillow and pillowcases, pads and personal hygiene items

If you spend time in the ED reception area:

- Keep the waiting rooms tidy
- Offer non-clinical help to anyone in the waiting room needing help
- Accompanying patients to the Urgent Treatment Centre
- To ensure patients know where other hospital facilities are located