

ENVIRONMENT

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT

Older people are major users of Emergency Departments (EDs) and tend to have longer ED stays than their younger counterparts. The ED environment can have an important influence on patient experience, but also outcomes. For example, an ED designed with the needs of older people in mind might lead to a reduction in delirium.

In contrast, poorly designed EDs might lead to immobility and bedsores, falls and injuries, increased levels of delirium and functional decline – as well as increasing patient and carer anxiety.

HOW CAN THE ED ENVIRONMENT BE IMPROVED?

There is a wealth of information available on improving design of health facilities to allow clinical areas meet the needs of older adults with sensory, physical or cognitive impairments.

There are three important considerations:

1. Physical space
2. Equipment and human resources
3. Staff behaviours

We have included simple changes for your existing department in “Tips: small changes for immediate impact” in the sub-headings below. For more in-depth information, see the design guidelines in the toolbox below. Many environmental recommendations can be incorporated within your ED at low or no additional cost. The most important component of a frailty-friendly Emergency Department is staff awareness of an older person’s needs.



This education material was developed by the *European Task Force for Geriatric Emergency Medicine*, which is a collaboration between the *European Society for Emergency Medicine (EUSEM)* and the *European Geriatric Medicine Society (EuGMS)*. For more information, please visit: geriEMEurope.eu and follow us on Twitter: [@geriEMEurope](https://twitter.com/geriEMEurope).

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WHAT CAN YOU DO?

1. Physical space

Small changes for immediate impact:

- De-clutter;
- Offer multiple cues for orientation to time and place, including clocks, calendars and clear wayfinding to bed spaces and toilets;
- Transform corridors into pleasant spaces for walking about safely;
- Ensure toilet seats and grab-rails are in contrasting colours;
- If more resources are available, install matt flooring and good-quality lighting.

2. Equipment & human resources

Ensure your older patients have easy access to mobility aids, sensory aids, continence aids and nutrition and hydration. Have staff available to facilitate access to these basic needs as well as encouraging meaningful activities.

Small changes for immediate impact:

- Offer sensory aids - glasses, hearing aid batteries, or a magnifying glass and portable amplifying device;
- Offer snacks and drinks;
- Encourage social dining with companions and engagement in meaningful activity in case of prolonged ED stay.

3. Staff behaviour

Staff should welcome family and ensure appropriate communication. Identifying geriatric syndromes, improving mobility and helping older people maintain their function are as important as ‘traditional’ emergency care.

TOOLBOX

- Universal Design - Ireland
- HBN building design - UK
- The King’s Fund “Is my ward dementia friendly” tool - UK
- ACEP guidelines - America
- Senior friendly hospital guidelines - Canada (summary of Irish & Canadian)



All toolboxes and additional information are available via QR-code.

REFERENCES

All relevant references to scientific publications can be found via the adjacent QR-code.

