Scenario 5: Admission to Hospital

You are an intern in the Emergency Department on a busy Saturday morning in July. You have just finished working-up and admitting your third patient of the day, a 63 year-old woman with unstable angina. You are pleased that you made the diagnosis quickly based on her history, exam and electrocardiogram. You promptly administered aspirin, topical nitrates, a beta-blocker and heparin. These medications relieved her pain and her electrocardiographic changes resolved. You asked that she be admitted to a telemetry bed to rule-out a myocardial infarction. You even called your colleagues who will be caring for the patient in the hospital to let them know about her history and what you have done for her. As you are finishing your note, the charge nurse tells you it will be another 2-3 hours before a telemetry bed will be available and asks you if she really needs one. You indicate that she must be monitored on telemetry and are frustrated that she will have to wait so long in the Emergency Department (ED).

As you are heading out to the waiting room to grab a cup of coffee, you notice that your first 2 patients of the morning are also still in the ED. The second patient was a 52 year-old gentleman with recurrent left leg cellulitis who you admitted for intravenous antibiotics. He is waiting for a bed, too. The first patient was a 75 year-old man whom you evaluated with your attending. He was intubated due to respiratory failure from a new pneumonia and chronic severe obstructive pulmonary disease. You find that your attending is still on the phone trying to find a staff physician who will accept the patient for admission to the intensive care unit. You are shocked at the delays that are occurring in getting patients transferred for admission to the hospital.

Finally, while standing at the coffee machine, a patient approaches you and asks what is going on in the ED today. He explains that he and many other patients have been waiting more than 2 hours to be seen. You are embarrassed and admit that it has been very busy, but that you are not sure why there is so much of a delay to be seen. You head back in to see your next patient and wonder what is going on.