You or someone you love is sick or injured. What should you do?

At times like this, it can be hard to think clearly. With this handout, you can plan ahead and think about the three W's:

- **WHEN** do I seek medical care?
- **WHERE** should I seek medical care?
- **WHAT** should I expect from the services I get?

What is a medical emergency?

A emergency is when a medical condition causes serious and severe symptoms. Not getting medical care right away might cause loss of life, lasting physical damage or serious injury to your body. If you feel your condition is a medical emergency you should seek immediate emergency care.

What should I do in a medical emergency?

If possible, call your primary care provider first. Your primary care provider can help you decide if there is a medical emergency and what the best action is for you to take.

If you are not able to call your primary care provider or you feel your health is threatened without immediate attention, call 911 for an ambulance or go directly to an emergency room.

What are my choices if I need medical care, but it is not an emergency?

Emergency rooms are for the treatment of serious and life-threatening conditions. Using an emergency room when you don't need one:

- Costs more - your ER copayment is probably higher than your copayment for other services. ER costs are one of the leading factors contributing to high health care costs.
- Is inefficient - you and everyone else there will have to wait longer
- Takes limited resources away from people who actually need them

Emergency rooms also don't offer the preventive health care services a primary care provider or a Walk-In Health Care Center can offer. Preventive services support your general health. They can include health evaluations, immunizations (shots to prevent disease), education, and other services. This can help you stay healthy, manage chronic health conditions, and prevent medical emergencies.

You may be faced with several choices. Do you:

- Call or see your primary care provider?
- Go to a Walk-In Health Care Center?
- Go to an Urgent Care Center?
- Call 911 or go directly to a hospital emergency room?

See the back page of this handout for guidelines on how to help select the correct care facility.

Which Care Facility Should I Choose?

Here are some guidelines for how to select the correct care facility:

First, call your primary care provider. He or she may give you advice over the phone or schedule you for an appointment. ***Check to see if your primary care office offers extended care hours.***

Second, HNE members can call HNE's Nurse Line at **800.842.4464.** A healthcare professional is available 24 hours to offer advice.

Third, If you can't reach your primary care provider consider these options:

Walk-In Health Care Centers are for treatment of common, non-life-threatening situations. They are staffed by nurse practitioners and physician assistants who provide treatment for common family illnesses and injuries, administer vaccinations, conduct physicals and wellness screenings, and offer monitoring for chronic conditions.

Walk-In Health Care Center practitioners can:

- Diagnose, treat and write prescriptions for common family illnesses such as strep throat, bladder infections, pink eye and infections of the ears, nose and throat
- Provide common vaccinations for flu, pneumonia, pertussis, and hepatitis, among others
- Treat minor wounds, abrasions, joint sprains and skin conditions such as poison ivy, ringworm and acne
- Provide a wide range of wellness services, including sports and camp physicals, smoking cessation and TB testing
- Offer routine lab tests, instant results and education for those with diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure or asthma

Urgent Care Centers have additional capabilities beyond the services you can get at a Walk-In Health Care Center. They are staffed by physicians, and can treat more serious conditions like broken bones. They have X-ray machines and can run other tests not available at a Walk-In Health Care Center. A list of contracted urgent care facilities is available on **hne.com.**

Call 911 or go to the Emergency Room If you are not able to call your primary care provider or you feel your health is threatened without immediate attention, call 911 for an ambulance or go directly to an emergency room.