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## How I Spent My Summer Vacation

Among the television programming offered to viewers this past summer was an eight-part network series promising unprecedented access to a modern medical center “off limits to cameras—until now.” Most of the episodes were set in my hospital and my emergency department, and the producers did a superb job demonstrating the miraculous achievements of modern medicine and surgery, though the emergency department sequences were sometimes unsettling.

To be sure, the incredible skills and heroic efforts of a plethora of cardiothoracic, gastrointestinal, and transplant surgeons were superbly captured and displayed week after week, as were the challenges and emotional crises so bravely and admirably faced by the patients and their families. In the end, if just one additional person donates an organ that restores one normal life as a result of this series, it will all have been worthwhile.

The ED appeared mostly in between the “big” stories or wrapped around commercial messages, and viewers with limited personal experience of hospital emergency departments might conclude that they are run largely by a few young nurses who summon doctors from remote locations to help deal with

unusual patients with unusual problems, life-threatening penetrating trauma, or cardiovascular catastrophes. This description more closely resembles ERs before emergency medicine became an organized specialty decades ago and EDs now play an expanded role in both hospital and outpatient medicine.

So, what is the harm of injecting some light comic relief into an otherwise serious, sobering, first-rate effort?

Many patients who unexpectedly find themselves in EDs, perhaps for the first time, are so frightened by the images of EDs they bring with them that they literally do not expect to see daylight again. Instead, they are often astounded to discover that they are being cared for by the most compassionate, considerate health care providers they have ever encountered. In our ED, along with the competent nurses chosen by the producers to represent the ED staff, are 123 other nurses and hundreds of NPs, PAs, techs, patient care facilitators, escorts, registrars, receptionists, housekeepers, social workers, physicians, and others, all committed to helping patients and their families in every way possible. Mature, experienced, and professional, they do not, as the series press release suggested, “spend more time with each other

than with their families.” In reality, each day after work, most return to their spouses, children, and homes in the city or surrounding suburbs. Our ED is staffed by the most compassionate, caring, and competent men and women I have ever had the privilege of working with.

And the 80,000 patients who came to our ED during the year the camera crews were with us were skillfully cared for with as much dignity and concern for privacy as possible, though they did not necessarily have problems considered interesting enough for a television audience.

All of this reminds me of a movie studio tour during a summer vacation with my family several years ago. I was enjoying the familiar movie sets on the tour until the tram turned the corner onto the modern “New York City Street,” replete with a yellow Checker taxi and a graffiti-covered bus and subway entrance—more than two decades after the last Checker cab rolled off the assembly line and a decade after all of the graffiti had disappeared from the *real* streets of the city I’ve lived in all my life. I wish the producers of this latest hospital series had had enough faith in their subject and their own compelling presentations to forgo the out-of-date iconic ED images they included.

**EM**