

California hospital staffs up to brace for 'election stress disorder'

By Amber Lee

Published November 5
2020 Election: Bay Area
KTVU FOX 2

Regional Medical Center preps for possible surge in election night cardiac patients

At least one Bay Area hospital prepared for a possible surge in cardiac patients as Election Day returns start flowing in Tuesday night.

SAN JOSE, Calif. - Many voters have expressed that they are experiencing anxiety and nervousness over the presidential election. Regional Medical Center in San Jose says it's put extra staff on standby because stress from the election could send more people to emergency rooms.

Dr. Paul Silka, the emergency department medical director for the hospital the possible increase in patients could result from what he describes as "election stress disorder."

"We've asked the staff to be extra aware for those patients who are presenting symptoms that could represent acute heart attack or acute neurological disease, a stroke," Silka said.

The emergency department usually sees 185 patients a day. But Silka says that number could go up to 210. He says the possible increase is based in part on the increase in patients in Florida following the 2016 presidential election. "There's great evidence that emotions, high-stress

events: soccer games, Super Bowl, earthquakes can trigger hormonal release," Silka said. And that patients with underlying conditions could be at risk.

At San Pedro Square, people say the election is top of mind. "It's been the topic all day with everyone I've interacted with. It's nonstop. Election, election, election," said Robin Ruiz of Menlo Park. "It's the fourth quarter and it feels like we're down by less than a touchdown. Touchdown or nothing."

Voters say they are coping with the stress of waiting for the outcome. "I get the text messages from my friends. I can't avoid the news. But at the end of the day, there's just a lot of uncertainty," says Jen Redding of San Francisco.

Doctors say the stress of the election is compounding the stress that many people are experiencing because of the pandemic. For those suffering from shortness of breath, chest pains and fatigue that persist, seek medical attention right away.

"If they're just anxious, they should just get out of the house. Go for a walk with friends, family members. and talk about it. Sometimes just talking about it offloads the emotional stress," said Dr. Shahid Siddiqui, a cardiologist with Regional Medical Center.

"I focus on what I can control and that helps the anxiety," says Redding.

Regional Medical Center says the extra on-call staff will be on standby through Friday. So far, doctors say they have not been needed.