

LIGHTS,

ACTION,

STOPWATCH

PHOTOS BY JOHN ABBOTT



Shrieking sirens. Clattering gurney wheels. Cries of "Stat!" Chicago native Erik Swanson, MPH '13, grew up with the 15-year television series *ER*. So perhaps he could be forgiven for craving a bit of drama from his summer in the NewYork-Presbyterian Emergency Department (ED).



DIDN'T HAPPEN. Then again, when you confront preconceptions, you're probably about to learn a lot. This summer, Mailman School students did precisely that, in practicums at more than 200 sites worldwide. // At the invitation of hospital administrators, including VP of operations Anthony Dawson, MSN, Swanson and four classmates spent two months as process improvement consultants. Their charge: Find ways to streamline the ED patient experience to provide the best care available, as quickly as possible. // But first there was a serious case of culture shock to overcome. "It was difficult to fathom how everyone worked together," says Swanson. To sort it out, the team deployed process improvement tactics borrowed from the automotive industry. In the ED—armed with iPads and stopwatches—they mapped the flow of patients, noting every interaction with providers, around the clock. // Their guru was

practicum adviser Joan Leiman, PhD '77, a special lecturer in Health Policy and Management and former chief of staff to the NewYork-Presbyterian CEO. "Early on, Joan set us on the right track by telling us to think about the ED through the eyes of a patient," says Swanson. "This became our mantra." // Fast-forward eight weeks. After dozens of interviews—with patients, nurses, docs, even execs and housekeeping staff—and days of data crunching, a new perspective emerged. "Not only does the ED have an organizational structure," says Swanson, "but many of the best industry practices were already in place." // In August, the students offered management 12 tips to further enhance efficiency. The work garnered high praise for its potential to improve care. At press time, Swanson was interviewing for healthcare consulting jobs, presumably with stopwatch in hand. —*Tim Paul*