The Emergency Severity Index (ESI) system runs the gamut from a patient who is literally going to die soon without an immediate intervention (Level 1) to a patient who doesn’t need anything other than an evaluation or treatment by a physician or nurse (Level 5). Level 2 patients are severely ill and will require multiple resources; Level 4 patients need a simple X-ray, lab test, or injection. Level 3 covers a broad range of conditions, so treatment needs can be more difficult to determine easily with a quick look. The great bulk of patients fall into this category.

A significant advance in emergency medicine service operations in recent years is an increasing ability to fast track 20 percent to 30 percent or more of the Level 3 patients. These Level 3 patients, identified according to specified criteria, and Level 4 and 5 patients can usually be fast tracked.

This figure shows the segmenting of patients coming into the emergency department with the ESI system. The system increases value for the provider and the patient by segmenting acuity and flow.

![Diagram](Figure 7.6: Segmenting ED Patient Flow)