A critical flow axiom is the concept from the figure below: Keep your vertical patients vertical and moving. Not all patients need beds; a patient should be in a bed only if it is medically necessary and only for as long as it is medically necessary, increasing the benefit-to-burden ratio for the patient and increasing bed turns.

The difference between having a patient in a bed for a short time for a focused evaluation and putting a patient in a bed for the entire time they’re in the department is a variable with a tremendous impact on flow in the department. A highly related concept from this figure is that patients who need few or limited resources should not routinely wait behind those patients who need multiple resources, regardless of how heavy the patient volume in the department is.