

## **Initiative Targets Faster Treatment for Heart Attacks**

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Every day, emergency medical workers make multiple runs to people who are having heart attacks.

With some technology and a new partnership with area hospitals, Louisville Metro EMS hopes to improve their survival rates by getting critical information to hospitals even before the patients arrive.

"Our goal is to open blocked arteries to the heart as fast as possible," said Dr. Neal Richmond, EMS director.

The new program is designed so that paramedics who take EKG readings of a patient having a heart attack can recognize whether it is a particular type known as an ST elevation myocardial infarction, or STEMI. Those patients benefit from getting to a hospital's cardiac catheterization lab as soon as possible. If such an attack is occurring, paramedics can send the EKG readings wirelessly to the destination hospital. The hospital can begin assembling doctors and preparing to do surgery that might save the patient's life.

The new procedure went into place early yesterday, Richmond said. Participating hospitals include Baptist East, Jewish, Norton, Norton Audubon and University in Louisville, and Clark Memorial and Floyd Memorial in Southern Indiana.

Each of the hospitals has the necessary technology to receive the wireless EKG results, and has agreed to start assembling its team before a patient arrives.

Richmond estimates 50 to 75 patients a month in Louisville — as many as two or three a day — suffer those types of heart attacks.

The American Heart Association recommends patients get critical intervention for heart attacks within 90 minutes. Richmond said he believes the new procedure will mean patients will get the needed intervention well within that time frame.

It cost EMS about \$100,000 to establish the technology link with the hospitals, which was provided by a grant from Norton Healthcare, Richmond said.

Lawren Just said she wishes this type of partnership existed when her husband had a heart attack in April 2001. It took five hours to get him into the catheterization lab because other treatments were attempted first, she said. Her husband died in the lab.

"Would he have survived" if the new equipment had been available? Just asked. "I don't know."

But she said his chances would have increased if he could have had an EKG on the way to the hospital, and then been rushed into the lab.

Just, who is chairwoman of the metro board of directors for the American Heart Association, said she believes the initiative will save lives. And that will mean the world to families, she said, recalling what her husband has missed.

"Every time another grandbaby's born, I think of how he would have loved this."

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