



May 20, 2010

Faster cardiac services in Durham to save lives

Thanks to partnership at Rouge Valley, Lakeridge and Durham EMS

Deborah Hammons, chief executive officer (CEO) of the Central East Local Health Integration Network (CE LHIN) is pleased to announce the successful expansion of the Code STEMI program into Durham Region. The program now links Lakeridge Health, Rouge Valley Health System (RVHS), and Durham Region Emergency Medical Services (EMS).

"This collaboration between healthcare partners to deliver the Code STEMI program is an excellent example of how, by working together, we can make a difference," says Hammons.

"Through initiatives such as these, we are improving emergency department wait times and reducing the impact of vascular diseases – like heart disease – for patients and their families," continues Hammons. "Regional programs for cardiac and stroke are important ways in which we expect to achieve our Strategic Aim of reducing the impact of vascular disease by 10% by 2013."

The Code STEMI program provides percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI), or angioplasty, which unblocks narrowed arteries in the heart within 90 minutes of a patient presenting with cardiac symptoms, allowing more lives to be saved.

"This is precisely the kind of system thinking that LHINs were designed to create and encourage. The Code STEMI initiative gets patients the care they need faster and most effectively by bringing them in directly from the ambulance to Rouge Valley's cardiac catheterization lab, bypassing the emergency department," says Ajax-Pickering MPP Joe Dickson. "I congratulate Rouge Valley, Lakeridge, Durham EMS and the Central East LHIN for this terrific innovation for patients and the community."

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“During a heart attack, we can’t skip a beat in getting patients to the right team, treatments and technology. This new program ensures that we are all working together, in perfect sync to save lives,” says Kevin Empey, president and CEO, Lakeridge Health.

In the event of specific types of heart attacks, Lakeridge Health’s emergency department team will call RVHS to activate the Code STEMI response. The patient is then transported immediately via ambulance to the RVHS cardiac catheterization lab, located at Rouge Valley Centenary in east Toronto, for an angioplasty. Following the angioplasty, the patient is returned to Lakeridge Health’s critical care department for ongoing care and recuperation.

“Having the ability to expedite angioplasty ensures patients across Durham Region receive the right care, at the right time in the right place. The sooner treatment can be administered by one of our cardiologists and our specialized team, the better a patient’s chance of surviving a heart attack,” says Natalie Bubela, vice president, regional programs, program integration, and chief nursing executive, RVHS.

“Durham Region EMS is honoured to be a member of this cooperative partnership with Lakeridge Health, Rouge Valley and the Central East Pre-Hospital Care Program to introduce Code STEMI to our communities,” says Richard Armstrong, director, Durham Region EMS. “Now, all 911 calls for patients experiencing chest pain, who meet the conditions for STEMI bypass, will result in these patients being immediately transported by Durham Region EMS directly to the Rouge Valley Centenary coronary care unit (CCU) ,then immediately to the cardiac catheterization lab, for timely PCI.”

Just one day after the program’s expansion, in late April, Rouge Valley accepted its first Code STEMI patient from Durham Region. Forty-nine year old Oshawa resident Kaleem Salam arrived at Lakeridge Health Oshawa’s emergency department with chest pains and a tingling sensation in his arms. Mr. Salam was quickly assessed by a highly trained triage team. Following an immediate electrocardiogram (ECG) confirming a heart attack, and after a thrombolytic, or clot-busting medication was administered, he was quickly transported by EMS to the Rouge Valley Centenary’s CCU.

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Salam received an angioplasty, performed by cardiologist Dr. Ram Vijayaraghavan and the experienced cardiac team, in the cardiac catheterization lab.

Just hours after the procedure, he was returned to Lakeridge Health where he could recover and be closer to his family. Activation of Code STEMI for those patients, like Salam, who are located outside of the recommended drive time to ensure the 90-minute timeframe is met, means that they will receive clot-busting medicine and then be sent quickly to the catheterization lab to reduce the impact of the heart attack on the patient.

“My doctors said that timing made the difference. They are all heroes. It’s because of them that I’m here today,” says Salam, who is recovering well, three weeks after the procedure.

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What is percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI)?

Percutaneous coronary intervention is a treatment procedure that unblocks narrowed coronary arteries of the heart without surgery. PCI, commonly known as angioplasty, is a therapeutic procedure used to treat the stenotic (narrowed) coronary arteries, associated with coronary heart disease. It can involve several treatment strategies. As part of the PCI procedure, a tiny balloon is inflated within the coronary artery to crush the plaque into the walls of the artery allowing for a more normal blood flow in the heart.

What is STEMI?

A STEMI is a Segment (ST) elevation myocardial infarction (STEMI). Myocardial infarctions (heart attacks) occur when a coronary artery suddenly becomes blocked, or at least partially blocked. This causes some of the heart muscle to become infarcted – meaning it dies or is dying.

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