



Dominican Hospital

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NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Communications & Marketing
(831) 462-7706

New, collaborative system saves lives on the Central Coast

Dominican and Watsonville Hospitals, emergency medical responders join forces for heart attack victims

SANTA CRUZ – When heart attacks happen, minutes matter.

Experts often say that time lost is heart lost. In fact, the nationally recommended timeline for a patient to receive lifesaving treatment in a cardiac catheterization lab after an acute heart attack is just 90 minutes.

In order to help local residents have the best odds of surviving—and thriving—after a cardiac arrest, three local agencies are teaming up. A recent study in Santa Cruz County demonstrated that having paramedics send electrocardiograms (ECGs) from suspected cardiac arrest patients to the Emergency Department cut more than 30 minutes from the total time it took for patients to receive lifesaving treatment.

As a result, Dominican Hospital, Watsonville Hospital and emergency medical responders throughout the county are working together to ensure that individuals with suspected heart attacks are brought to Dominican’s cardiac catheterization lab quickly.

“This system is already saving lives,” said Rama Khalsa, Santa Cruz County director of health services. “It is a tremendous resource to our community. We are fortunate to have the leadership of Dominican Hospital and the collaboration among all the partners needed to make this effort a success.”

Dominican’s door-to-balloon time (the average time it takes for a patient to go from the ED to the cath lab) is less than 65 minutes.

“We have been a center of excellence for STEMI care in for Santa Cruz for 20 years,” said Sarah Edmundson, RN, director of cardiovascular services. “For the past two years we have had response times of 60 minutes or less. The Santa Cruz County pre-hospital communication should make our times even better. This is top performance in the country.”

The collaboration starts in the emergency response vehicle. Fire and AMR paramedics recently acquired the necessary ECG equipment to quickly and accurately identify patients in need of cardiac intervention.

Test results are sent to physicians in the Dominican Hospital Emergency Department, who evaluate the information and prepare the cardiology team and cath lab.

Medic Anthony D'Addario saw firsthand the value of this collaboration after responding to a call for an ill and dizzy elderly man. Using the in-vehicle ECG, Mr. D'Addario and his partner determined their patient was having a heart attack, and they took him directly to Dominican Hospital's Emergency Department.

"Staff at Dominican took him to the cardiac catheterization lab, and sure enough, his right coronary artery was just about closed," said Mr. D'Addario. "His call to 911 saved his life, and our monitors proved how valuable they are."

At Watsonville Hospital, cardiac patients brought in by private vehicle are quickly evaluated to determine if an intervention at Dominican Hospital is necessary. If so, an ambulance—with that essential monitoring equipment—is dispatched to pick up the patient, and cardiology staff at Dominican is put on alert.

So far this year, 27 patients have received lifesaving care through this vital collaboration. Dominican Hospital's door-to-balloon time remains far below the nationally recommended average—in fact, the first patient to utilize the program went from the Emergency Department to the catheterization lab in just 38 minutes.

Support for this project came from a number of sources. The fire agencies used grant funds to purchase the heart monitors for their paramedic response vehicles, and AMR was able to obtain discounted pricing for the monitors.

The Santa Cruz County Emergency Medical Services Agency provided funding for the equipment needed by the hospitals and emergency response vehicles to transmit the ECGs.

"This project was a high priority for our community's fire agencies and is a fundamental part of our mission to provide excellent service to Santa Cruz County residents," said Jeff Terpstra, general manager, Emergency Medical Services Integration Authority. "Nothing is more satisfying to our firefighters than knowing that their quick actions saved someone's life. This project enhances our ability to do exactly that."

Staff from both Dominican and Watsonville Hospitals worked tirelessly to ensure that collaboration between the facilities results in seamless care for patients needing the specialized cardiac intervention available at Dominican.

Photo caption: Local emergency responders demonstrate the use of the first-responder ECG equipment.