

Heart program pays off for paramedics, patients

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By: Julie Slack

February 19, 2009 08:24 PM - A new program at Trillium Health Centre Mississauga that aims to provide heart attack patients with quicker access to life-saving care is already paying dividends for Halton residents — but Peel residents will have to wait several months.

Through the Cardiac Regional Direct PPCI (primary percutaneous coronary intervention) program, launched last Dec. 14, heart attack patients across the GTA will be brought by paramedics directly to Trillium's Hazel McCallion Centre for Heart Health, bypassing the emergency department at their local hospital.

The program is being introduced in phases, the first of which allows Halton Region paramedics — who, unlike their Peel counterparts, are already trained in using equipment in the field to determine heart attack status — to bring patients directly to Trillium's cardiac care facility.

When Peel paramedics have completed the necessary training, which is expected to take several months, they, too, will be able to rush patients directly to the Hazel McCallion Centre for Heart Health.

Until then, those suffering a heart attack in Mississauga will first be taken to the emergency department at either Credit Valley Hospital or Trillium Health Centre Mississauga, and then transferred, as required, to Trillium's cardiac care centre, where surgeons utilize a life-saving procedure that involves the insertion of a stent, or tube, into clogged arteries to help maintain blood circulation.

Once treated, the patient is moved back to their local hospital for further care.

Only paramedics with advanced care training can use the ECG (electro-cardiogram) to determine if a patient is having a heart attack. Once confirmed, they contact Trillium's on-call cardiologist directly and a team is immediately prepared for the patient's arrival.

Each region in the GTA is required to have a percentage of its paramedics trained in such care. John Hardiman, of Milton, was the first patient to benefit from the new program. Since then, 10 others have been treated.

On Dec. 21, Hardiman felt ill after waking up. His wife called Halton paramedics, who were on the scene in five minutes. The first responders quickly determined he would be taken directly to the cardiac care centre in Mississauga.

Once there, Hardiman underwent a 76-minute procedure to repair his heart. He was sent home four days later.

At a press conference held Wednesday at Trillium, Hardiman thanked members of the cardiac care team who saved his life.

Dr. Randy Watson, a cardiologist and Trillium's PPCI program director, said his team of doctors and nurses is on call around-the-clock. He said the new program is truly a life-saver.

"Time is everything," said Watson. "The heart is saved by this program. The minutes the heart is blocked cause irreversible damage. This is a terrific breakthrough."



Staff photo by Rob Beintema

Trilium Health Centre displayed their new cardiac intervention program for the media on Wednesday. Here, Heart attack victim John Hardiman (right), the very first patient to be saved by the program, visits some of the cardiac nurses, like Sandra Dowers, who looked after him.