

Cash helps patients

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Heart smarts. The Mississauga-Halton Local Health Integration Network announced the province's \$120 million commitment to Hospital High Growth Funding today Trillium Health Centre. Here, Ed Skrlj, a heart-attack victim saved by the hospital's STEMI program, talks with Joleen Fonseca, the Tactical Advanced Care Paramedic who responded to his 9-1-1 call. *Staff photo by Rob Beintema*

A \$1-million infusion from Queen's Park will allow Trillium Health Centre to continue offering heart attack patients in Peel access to cutting-edge, life-saving care - and in record time.

The money, announced today and to come annually from the Province, will support Code STEMI, a collaborative effort between Trillium and Peel Regional Paramedic Services. It's designed to help patients with ST-Elevation Myocardial Infraction (STEMI), a heart attack in which a blocked coronary artery prevents the flow of blood and oxygen to the heart.

Through the innovative program, paramedics treating patients perform a quick electrocardiogram and immediately alert a cardiologist at Trillium to initiate Code STEMI.

Within 68.5 minutes, on average, of leaving their doorstep with paramedics, patients are on the road to recovery after having been taken directly to Trillium's cardiac catheterization lab - instead of an emergency room - and having the blocked artery repaired and healed.

The success of the Code STEMI program has earned Trillium the reputation of being the world's best in the field, said Dr. Randy Watson, a Trillium cardiologist and co-lead of the program. "At 68.5 minutes, we're exceeding the goal of treating the patient in Trillium's cath lab (in a timely manner)," said Watson. "Evidence shows this time frame is crucial because time is muscle. Bringing patients directly into the cath lab makes all the difference to a speedy, successful recovery for most patients."

The program was launched in 2008 and initially involved Trillium and Halton paramedics. Peel paramedics joined the program last August.

Between July and September of last year, 34 patients - 24 were treated by Peel paramedics - experienced firsthand the power of timely medical intervention, officials say.

Mississauga's Ed Skrlj, 55, suffered a heart attack last October. Within 54 minutes – the fastest treatment time yet recorded by the program – Skrlj was well on his way to recovery. Thanks to timely intervention, there was virtually no damage to his heart muscle.

“I urge everyone to improve their heart health,” Skrlj said. “Middle-aged men need to drop their macho attitudes and learn not to ignore the symptoms.”

Dr. Sheldon Cheskes, medical director at Sunnybrook Osler Centre for Pre-hospital Care, which trains paramedics in the program, said according to the standard set by the American Heart Association, the average time from first medical contact to the cath procedure is 90 minutes, but very few jurisdictions in the world meet that standard.

However, the Peel initiative has far surpassed it, and repeatedly, he noted.

“Very few places meet the time. We wanted to be better. We set out to be the best,” said Cheskes.