

Time is Heart Muscle – In the world of medicine being highly reliable is absolutely essential. One of the ways healthcare organizations achieve reliability is through the use of checklists. When time is critical a checklist assures that the medical team provides the right care to the right patient at the right time and in the right place. One of the best examples of this is when we care for a patient in our emergency room that is experiencing a heart attack.

Recognizing the symptoms of a heart attack is the first link in a chain of events that will contribute to a good outcome. If you are experiencing any of the symptoms associated with heart attack, such as chest pain or pressure, neck, jaw or arm pain, dizziness or shortness of breath you should call 911 immediately. Don't delay; seconds count. Every moment the heart muscle is stressed you are causing damage to your cardiovascular system. The key to a good outcome is prompt care.

In 2008 Garfield County Hospital and our sister hospitals in Eastern Washington adopted an innovative standard for heart attack care called the Cardiac Level 1 Protocol. This protocol is now assuring that patients in our rural communities are receiving some of the most reliable and prompt heart attack care available anywhere in the nation. Some rural hospitals are getting patients into the cardiac catheterization lab in Spokane in less than 90 minutes consistently, success almost unheard of just months ago.

The protocol is initiated immediately when a patient presents to our local hospital. The professional medical staff performs diagnostic tests to confirm the heart attack, communicates directly with the cardiologist at the receiving hospital, administers life saving medications and initiates the rapid transport of the patient. What is so unique about the Level 1 Protocol is how the system works. Our local hospital is partnered with Northwest Medstar, Lifeflight and the most respected heart care centers in the state Sacred Heart and Deaconess Hospital in Spokane to achieve fast reliable care by putting the patient in the express lane to the cardiac catheterization lab. This approach eliminates troubling delays that cost the patient heart muscle.

What can you do? Know your risk factors; a history of cardiac problems, diabetes, smoking, hypertension, obesity and age (males > 35 Females > 40). And take care of yourself; get regular check ups with your health provider, consider increasing your activity level, make healthy eating choices and take your medication as prescribed. Most of all, don't delay if you suspect you may be having a heart attack. Remember...Time is Heart Muscle.