SoMd Hospital Saves a Life by Accepting First Heart Attack Patient by Helicopter

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Southern Maryland Hospital physicians, nurses, and staff worked seamlessly with land and air Emergency Medical Services (EMS) professionals and saved a life as a result. On Friday, October 29, the hospital accepted its first heart attack patient via helicopter. Maryland state Medevac units have been authorized to transport heart attack patients (STEMI patients) directly to Southern Maryland Hospital, bypassing local hospitals that do not have the ability to perform primary coronary intervention. This was the first heart attack patient transported by helicopter to Southern Maryland Hospital.

A 911 call came in at 1:10 p.m. from a man in King George, Va. The Charles County paramedic who responded suspected that the patient was having a heart attack and that he needed to be taken to a cardiac interventional center immediately. The paramedic assessed the chances of quickly transporting the man 50 miles in Friday afternoon traffic and requested a Medevac helicopter. At 2:19 p.m., little more than an hour after the patient’s 911 call, the helicopter touched down at Southern Maryland Hospital.

The emergency cardiac care team on call, led by Interventional Cardiology Attending Physician Muhammad Ashraf, M.D., was waiting to receive the patient. The man did indeed have a 90% blockage in a major coronary artery, and his blockage was removed approximately 35 minutes after the helicopter arrived. This “door-to-balloon” time (time from arrival at the hospital to angioplasty) is significantly less than the typical benchmark for hospitals of less than 90 minutes. “Because of the patient’s rapid transport to the cath lab, the patient had a quick resolution of his cardiac emergency and is now doing well,” said Dr. Ashraf.

Hospital and EMS officials alike are delighted with this case’s outcome. “We are very pleased with how smoothly this process went,” said hospital Assistant Chief Nurse and C-Port program coordinator Reba McVay. “The Emergency Department and Security Department personnel had trained and prepared for the helicopter transport, and everyone worked as a team to help this patient.” First Sergeant Charlie W. Eisele, flight paramedic for the Maryland State Police Aviation Command, agrees, “all of the parts of the state’s emergency medical system worked together, and this was truly a life saved.”

Founded in 1977, Southern Maryland Hospital is a 358-bed full service hospital serving the Washington, D.C., metro and Southern Maryland areas. Additionally, the hospital operates a state-of-the-art twenty-four bed subacute unit. Throughout Southern Maryland Hospital’s history, it has remained a community leader, a strong supporter of health care education, and a dedicated advocate for quality health care services.