

IN A HEARTBEAT



Wireless technology advances care for Salina heart emergencies

BY JOHN BERGGREN

Time is critical when a patient is experiencing the early onset of a heart attack. New wireless technology utilized by Salina Emergency Medical Services is helping doctors get patients the care they need faster.

The technology allows Salina EMS responders to send electrocardiograms (EKGs) to a dedicated fax machine in the emergency department at Salina Regional Health Center while on the scene or en route with a patient experiencing chest pain.

“We used to rely on paramedics to interpret the findings of an EKG and they would radio them in ahead of their arrival,” says Sean Herrington, M.D., emergency department physician at Salina Regional. “Our paramedics are very well trained and can tell if there are obvious signs of a heart attack, but this technology allows us as doctors to interpret the information for ourselves and speed up the decision-making process of what treatment options are needed well in advance of their arrival.”

A grant from the Salina Regional Health Foundation helped purchase the software and dedicated fax machine in the emergency department to receive the advanced warning EKGs.

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

“This is leading-edge technology for Kansas and it will make a dramatic difference in the door-to-drug time for patients having a heart attack,” says Marvin Van Blaricon, Salina EMS division chief. “Physicians in the emergency department can make preparations for the interventions that will need to take place, whether that’s administering medicine or calling in a cardiologist or surgeon.”



Salina EMS paramedics are now able to send EKGs from the field to physicians in Salina Regional’s emergency department.

In some cases, patients experiencing a heart attack are given clot-busting drugs called thrombolytics to clear clogged arteries of the heart. When patients are candidates for this type of treatment, the sooner the drugs are administered, the better.

“For these patients the advanced EKGs could literally mean the difference between life and death,” Herrington says. “Most studies show that the sooner we get the thrombolytics into their system, the better their outcome will be.”

“We really have to give credit to EMS for bringing this project forward,” Herrington says. “We’re lucky in Salina to have one of the better, well-trained programs in the state. It took a lot of progressive work on their part to make this possible.”