

Halton tops in dealing with heart attacks

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Cheskes said each 30-minute delay opening up the blocked vessel increases the patient's chances of death by 7.5 per cent. "Few systems have been able to achieve a contact time of less than 90 minutes," he said.

Halton is an exception to the rule.

By bypassing the emergency department and heading straight to the cardiac catheterization lab, Halton cases average 70 minutes between EMS contact and surgery, shaving 37 minutes off the average pre-bypass time. "I wouldn't say we're leaders, we're world-leaders in this process," said Cheskes.

Once getting to a hospital, patients who went to the emergency department took 83 minutes to get the angioplasty surgery, while those who went straight to the lab took 35 minutes. "Even more outstanding is we did this despite increasing our travelling distance by 50 per cent," Cheskes explained.

Whereas patients used to be treated at the closest hospital, now patients from Oakville, Milton and Halton Hills are all transported directly to Mississauga's Trillium hospital and Burlington patients are transported to Hamilton General.

Halton's director of emergency medical services Greg Sage said about 50 per cent of cardiac arrest cases in the region are treated by paramedics. Of those cases in which a shockable heart rhythm exists, meaning a patient could be treated with defibrillation, the survival rate is 39

per cent— 9 per cent higher than what Cheskes describes as a "very high" rate.

The survival rates in Halton are increasing, according to Cheskes, due to more bystanders performing CPR. "The odds of survival increases by four times (with CPR). There's very little out there that increases survival by that high of a percentage."

The region is rolling out two new programs to get more residents comfortable with CPR. Four south Halton high schools are currently partaking in the CPR anytime program. One group goes through the traditional three-hour CPR training program and another group uses the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada CPR Anytime DVD, a 45-minute course. After eight months, the region will test the effectiveness of the compressed course versus the traditional one.

"The thought is the more we can reduce the time it takes to teach CPR, the more people will be inclined to take the training," said Sage.

This spring Halton paramedics will test a new guideline from the American Heart Association which removes the requirement for members of the general public to administer mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to cardiac arrest patients, and rather, focus on chest compressions.

"In the past there's been a stigma around mouth-to-mouth," said Sage. "The thought is people will be more inclined to do CPR now that mouth-to-mouth has been taken out of the equation."

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