Primary Angioplasty a Lifesaver for Heart Attack Patients at New Jersey Hospital

Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital in New Brunswick, NJ, has announced a hospital-wide commitment to treat patients showing signs of an active heart attack first with angioplasty to save their lives.

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ (PRWEB) August 27, 2004 -- Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital (RWJUH) has announced a hospital-wide commitment to treat patients showing signs of an active heart attack first with angioplasty to save their lives. This aggressive, life-saving treatment is only available at a limited number of New Jersey hospitals.

Using angioplasty to open clogged arteries in the first hours of a heart attack saves more lives and results in better, long-term outcomes than other therapies, many peer-reviewed studies have shown.

"This is a life-saving program," said John Kostis, MD, Chief, Medical Service at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, and Chairman of the Department of Medicine at UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. "Many studies have proven that moving people quickly to angioplasty as soon as symptoms start reduces mortality, so we designed a program putting the research findings into practice."

RWJUH created the Primary Angioplasty program to move patients showing signs of myocardial infarction or heart attack immediately to its Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory. Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital houses one of the busiest Catheterization Laboratories, or Cath Labs, in the state of New Jersey. Inside the Cath Lab, a team of cardiac specialists strive to perform angioplasty within 90 minutes of a heart-attack patient's arrival. In order to make this commitment, interventional cardiologists, cardiac surgeons, nurses and other specialists are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Angioplasty is a minimally-invasive procedure that involves sliding a balloon-tipped catheter into a narrowed or blocked artery of the heart, to widen the artery and restore blood flow. In the majority of cases, mesh stents are inserted to prop the vessel open.

In some instances, a heart attack victim may require bypass surgery rather than angioplasty, a procedure that can be performed only at hospitals with a cardiac surgery program, such as Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital.

Before the hospital launched the Primary Angioplasty program, a number of patients who arrive with signs of an active heart attack would likely have first been treated with thrombolytic or "clot busting" drugs. While thrombolysis is effective, recent studies conclude that angioplasty is 60 percent more effective than clot-busting drugs in reducing death from heart attack, provided the procedure is done in less than two hours of a heart attack.

An important aspect of RWJUH's program is the special training and equipment provided to its paramedics. Emergency responders on board the hospital's Advanced Life Support ambulances can transmit electrocardiogram (EKG) tests performed in the vehicle to the hospital's Emergency Department, helping physicians reach a diagnosis more quickly.
Primary Angioplasty is only effective if it can be performed promptly. One advantage over thrombolytic therapy is gaining a full knowledge of a patient’s coronary anatomy, said Dr. Ted Gutowski, an interventional cardiologist with the practice Heart Specialists of Central Jersey in Manalapan. I like the fact that there are less strokes with angioplasty and also the result of the treatment is more verifiable and predictable.

Primary angioplasty is important, but only a small part of the treatment of a cardiac patient, added Dr. Kostis. The risk factors for heart attack, which include high blood pressure, smoking, high cholesterol and diabetes, are more important in the long term and all must be addressed as part of treatment.

Studies also have shown it is important to have an experienced cardiology program in order to create Primary Angioplasty program. RWJUH has one of the state’s busiest cardiac catheterization programs, and provides the service 24 hours a day, seven days a week. By far, most angioplasties are done before the patient reaches a crisis.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in America in both men and women, and the most common form of heart disease is coronary artery disease, in which the arteries that carry blood to the heart become partially clogged or blocked. A heart attack occurs when this blockage prevents the heart from receiving the oxygen it needs to function.

For more information on Primary Angioplasty, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital advises patients to speak with their cardiologist or primary care physician, or call the hospital’s Heart Center of New Jersey (732) 937-8030.

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