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## Mission Lifeline: Medical workers teaming up to save heart attack patients

By Charmaine Smith-Miles

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ANDERSON — South Carolina is a leader in the nation for the number of people who suffer from heart disease.

In fact, state health department research shows that heart disease is the leading cause of death for residents — killing more than the total number of people who die of all cancers, pneumonia, influenza and car accidents combined.

Mission Lifeline, a national project, began Monday in the Upstate to help change that statistic.

Cardiologists, emergency medical workers, emergency room doctors and other medical workers met at AnMed Health to discuss how they can coordinate better care of patients who are suffering from heart attacks in which their arteries are completely blocked.

The purpose of Mission Lifeline is to have physicians share information on how to care for heart attack patients, determine where a patient can receive the best treatment in a region, and determine what facilities need better equipment or more training.

"This is a coordinated effort to get patients to the best facility for them no matter where they live," said Elaine Reimels, AnMed Health's senior director of heart and vascular care.

For example, Reimels said, patients suffering heart attacks might come to AnMed Health Medical Center instead of the hospital closest to them — if it is the best place to receive the quickest and highest-quality treatment.

The project will also mean other changes, officials said. Some of the other goals of the Mission Lifeline project include establishing common performance goals and creating a system in which medical workers, such as paramedics, can make one call and notify everyone on a cardiac team that a heart patient is in route to a facility.

Mission Lifeline is a national project of the American Heart Association. Planning for it began about two years ago.

About the same time, the South Carolina Hospital Association was also looking at a similar program that would improve care to patients suffering from heart attacks, said Carolyn Bivona, the heart association's director for state alliances.

In South Carolina, the American Heart Association, the state's Hospital Association, the state's chapter of the American College of Cardiology, the state's chapter of the College of Emergency Physicians, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control have partnered to create Mission Lifeline.

The state will be divided into four regions for the project: the Midlands, the Pee Dee, the Upstate and the Low Country, Bivona said.

Thanks to a private donor, a director for Mission Lifeline has been hired for the Low Country. Now advertisements are going out to find such a director for the Upstate, Bivona said. In the Low Country, the director has already started talking with hospital staffs to see how they are doing in heart health care and where they can improve.

In some cases, a hospital may need more training for emergency room staff or ambulances might need better equipment.

"She is finding out what some of their challenges are and where they need assistance improving their system of care," Bivona said. "It may be different from one hospital to another."



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