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Nearly half of the visitors to Snoqualmie Valley Hospital emergency room complain of chest pain. So it wasn't a shock when Murray Lorraine wearily walked into the facility, announcing similar symptoms.

Most such complaints are the real deal. But Lorraine's visit was an act, part of a drill held Feb. 23 to test the hospital's reaction system for heart attacks.

During a heart attack, hospitals use a cardiac catheterization laboratory, or cath lab, to evaluate heart function and determine further treatment.

Snoqualmie doesn't have a cath lab. That's why the hospital sends heart attack patients on to Overlake, Evergreen or Swedish Hospital medical centers.

"Historically, when we have someone come in with this variety of heart attack, we've had to initiate contact with receiving facilities," said Dr. Kimberly Witkop, medical director at Snoqualmie Valley Hospital. "You need to get them in the cath lab."

Due to government regulations, it's often difficult to transfer a patient from one hospital to another. That's because there must be an accepting physician at the second hospital.

"That slows you down a bit," said Duane Anderson, a doctor at Snoqualmie Valley Hospital who took part in the drill. "If you don't have a plan, you often have to call several hospitals to find out if they have a bed or an accepting doctor."

Snoqualmie Valley Hospital has teamed up with Overlake in an agreement streamlining the process, ensuring availability and speeding up responses.

Since most chest pain patients walk through the door of their nearest health care facility, Snoqualmie Valley Hospital has to have a contingency in place, said Beverly Davidson, nurse manager in the Snoqualmie emergency room.

"We get people in the door who should have called 911 — because that is always a faster way," Witkop said. After discussing various ambulance services and helicopters, "we found out the fastest way is just to call 911 and have the medics come," she said.

As Lorraine made his way into the emergency room, hospital employees took their roles and got the procedure started.

While some staffers called 911, others put him in a room, tested his heart's electrical activity through an EKG (electrocardiogram), recorded vitals and took an X-ray — all in a matter of minutes before medics arrived to transport Lorraine to Overlake Hospital Medical Center.

Lorraine arrived at Overlake within the hospital's goal of 90 minutes.

"We've created a process by which we make one call to their ER, and they activate the cath lab at any time of day or night to respond to the patients who we recognize that have respiration problems," said Davidson.

Through the drill of orchestration, hospital staff hope that the pre-form system can happen almost as fast as if a heart attack victim had called 911 himself.

"I felt great, it went really smooth," Anderson said.

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