

Murray Lorange said he didn't feel so good. Pale and disoriented, he wandered into the Snoqualmie Valley Hospital emergency room, complaining of chest pain.

Actually, Lorange was faking his heart attack, and for good reason. The retired firefighter has helped many a heart attack patient, and he knew just how to act like one for a drill at the hospital.

Every year, the hospital sees more patients experiencing heart attack symptoms, said Kim Witkop, a hospital physician and vice president of medical affairs. Every month, an average of one or two patients come in complaining of heart attack symptoms — chest pressure, difficulty breathing, discomfort that radiates up into the neck or into the arm, nausea and sweating, Witkop said.

Snoqualmie Valley Hospital doctors have to send any patient suffering from a heart attack to Overlake Hospital Medical Center.

The reason?

The hospital does not have a cardiac catheterization laboratory, called a cath lab for short. Cath labs can save patients who are having a heart attack (when the heart muscle is damaged) before the patient goes into cardiac arrest (when the heart stops pumping blood).

Only three hospitals on the Eastside have cath labs, including Overlake in Bellevue, Evergreen Hospital Medical Center in Kirkland and Valley Medical Center in Renton.

Snoqualmie Valley Hospital was practicing the drill to see if it could get a patient from Snoqualmie to Overlake's cath lab in 90 minutes or less, a national goal, Witkop said.

The hospital's drill was almost a year in the making. Before, if a patient were having a heart attack, hospital staff would call Overlake and ask if it could admit the patient.

Now, Overlake has agreed to streamline the process with Snoqualmie Valley Hospital. Plus, the hospital has made a medical form that goes with the patient en route to Overlake, so no time is lost when the patient gets to the cath lab.

"Our goal is to get this choreographed," Snoqualmie Valley Hospital Emergency Systems Coordinator Rick Green said.

Carolyn Holmes, nurse manager of invasive cardiovascular services at Overlake, said the coordinated effort was important. Before the coordination, the hospital would have to call several numbers at Overlake to get the ball rolling. Now, they just have to call one.

"The faster you go, the more muscle you save," Holmes said.

As soon as Lorange entered the emergency room, doctors, nurses and technicians jumped into action.

Within four minutes, they had run an electrocardiogram, a test measuring the heart's electrical activity.

They called 911, recorded his vitals and gave him a pretend dose of morphine to ease the pain.

At 20 minutes, Bellevue Fire Department Medic One arrived to take part in the transport. If the situation demanded it, the hospital would call Airlift Northwest for helicopter removal, Witkop said.

Lorange, playing the confused sick patient, spoke up and asked why he couldn't stay in Snoqualmie.

"I wish you could, but we don't have the facility here," Dr. Duane Anderson said, talking about the cath lab.

By 55 minutes, Lorange was at the Overlake emergency room, although that time would have been slightly faster if the ambulance driver had turned on the sirens, which he didn't for the drill, Green said.

"As you can see, our times are well within those limits (of 90 minutes), so we are very pleased," Green said.

After the drill, hospital staff convened to discuss how they could make the process even better.

John McNeill, with Bellevue Medic One, commended the hospital for orchestrating the drill, but he advised people to call 911 if they think they are having a heart attack.

Often, people who are in denial or who don't understand the gravity of the situation will come to Snoqualmie Valley Hospital, which can waste time they could be using getting to the cath lab.

"We can get there quicker," McNeill said.

Laura Geggel: 392-6434, ext. 221, or lgeggel@snovalleystar.com.

Getting patients to safety when seconds matter SLIDESHOW | March 3, 2010



1

Playing a heart attack victim, Murray Lorange (right) is checked out by at Snoqualmie Valley Hospital.



2

Emergency room staff hover over Lorange, while a monitor (left) notes the drill's progress.



3

Staff find out what Lorange's fake symptoms are. For a more realistic simulation, Lorange's face has been painted

white.



4

A doctor calls 911 to request an ambulance to transport Lorange to Overlake Medical Center, which has a catheter lab to treat heart attack victims.



5

Observers monitor the drill's progress



6

Lorange waits for transport.



7

Time can mean the difference between life and death during heart attacks.



8

Paramedics arrive to take Lorange to Overlake Medical Center.



9

Hospital staff and paramedics lift Lorange onto a stretcher.



10

Lorange is put into an aid car for transport.