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St. Elizabeth combines technology, collaboration to reduce time-to-treatment for heart attack patients

Edgewood, KY – In the past year, St. Elizabeth Healthcare significantly decreased the time-to-treatment for heart attack patients, following an effort by stakeholders from every part of the care team to collaborate and improve processes that speed up care. This improvement was due in part to the use of a mobile app Pulsara, which puts timely, clear information in the hands of everyone responsible for caring for the patient, both inside and outside of the hospital.

For patients who came to St. Elizabeth Edgewood via life squad, time from “first medical contact” (FMC) to the moment of artery-opening treatment has dropped 30 percent from an average 103 minutes in the first quarter of 2016 to an average of 72 minutes in January 2017. “Reducing time-to-treatment for patients does not happen without effort,” said Kami Tehrani, DO, Cardiologist, St. Elizabeth Heart & Vascular Institute. “A committed team of individuals including administrators, physicians, emergency medical services (EMS) personnel, and frontline staff worked tirelessly to put changes in place that have made these gains possible.” The collaboration began when St. Elizabeth agreed to participate in a research study sponsored by Yale Global Health Leadership Institute called Leadership Saves Lives. The goal of the study was to reduce inpatient heart attack deaths by influencing organizational culture.

The Pulsara app is a technology that has fueled the improvements. Once triggered by EMS in the field, or by the Emergency Department (ED), the app instantly sends the EKG to the cardiologist and alerts the on-call Cath Lab team. “This is particularly useful during evenings and weekends, ensuring physicians and staff are on their way to the hospital more quickly,” explained Mohanjit Brar, MD, Cardiologist, St. Elizabeth Heart & Vascular Institute. “This single point of instantaneous information speeds communication and creates a team of people all working together to literally ‘beat the clock’: The app includes a countdown clock so that everyone knows how they are doing against the benchmark time of 90 minutes.”

St. Elizabeth is the only hospital in Kentucky, Ohio or Indiana to utilize the Pulsara app. St. Elizabeth has paid for licensing to put it in the hands of any Northern Kentucky EMS department that wants to participate.

“As providers of heart attack care, we keep raising the bar on ourselves,” noted Jason A. Murray, MD, Emergency Physician at St. Elizabeth Healthcare. “The American Heart Association several years ago set a benchmark of 90 minutes from ‘door to balloon,’ the time measured from when the patient arrived at the ED by life squad or private car to artery-opening treatment. Today the goal has been moved to 90 minutes from ‘first medical contact’ to their artery-opening treatment, meaning we are now counting the time from when the life squad first arrives to the scene. But we are seeing that by working as a team we not only can reach that benchmark but we can exceed it.”

“This improvement underscores the importance of calling 911 in the event of heart attack symptoms,” added Phil Dietz, firefighter and EMS coordinator for several Northern Kentucky fire departments. “EMS personnel can perform an EKG and get information to the hospital so physicians and staff are ready for the patient when he or she arrives. They also can perform life-saving activities on the way that may be necessary. None of these things can happen if you go to the ER by car. We say, ‘time is (heart) muscle,’ which means that every minute saved improves patient outcomes. Minutes matter.”

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