



(Left) Proud participants in the Code STEMI program are, in front center, Dr. Bruce Dockery, M.D., a cardiologist with Tennessee Heart, and behind him, from left, Jeff Crockett, director of Smith County EMS; Jeff Garrett, critical care paramedic, Overton County EMS; Tommy Copeland, CCP, director of Putnam County EMS; Mike Kerr, EMT-PCC, director of White County EMS; Darren Ford, CCP, assistant director of Putnam County EMS; Randy Davidson, paramedic supervisor, Cumberland County EMS; Hoyte Hale, paramedic, DeKalb County EMS; Jonathan Beaty, critical care paramedic, Fentress County EMS; Stevie Cooper, paramedic, Fentress County EMS; and Jacob Dickerson and Ethan Burris, paramedics, Jackson County EMS.

CODE STEMI SAVES LIVES

Program Empowers EMS to Activate Cath Team in Transit

EVERY MINUTE THAT PASSES AFTER A HEART ATTACK STARTS, HEART MUSCLE DIES.

The Code STEMI program, started in 2006 at Cookeville Regional, has been very successful in reducing the time it takes to get heart attack victims — especially those in outlying counties — the life-saving interventions they need.

The program works by empowering emergency medical technicians in the field to conduct an EKG and determine, from the results and from the symptoms they witness, whether they think the patient is having a heart attack. “If they recognize that the person

is having a heart attack, they call the emergency room, and the emergency room activates everyone involved in taking care of people with heart attacks,” said Dr. Bruce Dockery, a cardiologist at Tennessee Heart who, with Dr. Stacy Brewington, helps train area paramedics to use the protocol. “Essentially, the goal is to have everybody show up at the same time so that there’s minimal wait for the patient.”

For EMS crews in counties outside of Putnam, the Code STEMI program means that if they believe the patient is having a heart attack, they can take the patient straight to Cookeville Regional — the only facility between Nashville and Knoxville that can treat heart attacks — instead of

stopping first at the nearest hospital. “Before, what would happen is the paramedics would pick people up at home, take them to the local hospital, and if that hospital didn’t have the capability of stopping a heart attack, then they would have to be transferred to another facility, which takes a lot of time,” said Dr. Dockery.

Cookeville Regional’s current average “door-to-balloon time” — the time from when the patient begins receiving medical care to the time the blocked artery is cleared — is between 36 and 43 minutes, according to cath lab coordinator Hillary Flatt, RN, who says she’s witnessed some impressive success stories because of the Code STEMI program.

Area EMTs are especially pleased with the increased ability the Code STEMI program gives them to help the heart attack victims they encounter while on duty.

“I’ve seen people that we’ve brought in that I didn’t think would ever make it, and you see them three or four days later, and they’re getting to go home,” said Jeff Garrett, a critical care paramedic with Overton County EMS. “Code STEMI is a wonderful thing.”

Be Aware!

Warning Signs of a Heart Attack

According to the American Heart Association, the following symptoms are signs you might be having a heart attack:

- Chest discomfort
Especially a feeling of pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes or goes away and comes back
- Discomfort in other areas of the upper body
Can be in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach
- Shortness of breath
With or without chest discomfort
- Other signs
Such as breaking out in a cold sweat or feeling nauseated or lightheaded

Don’t ignore these signs hoping they’ll go away. Call 9-1-1 immediately, because time is muscle! For more information, visit heart.org.