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RPS/UAB conducting new trauma trial in Walker County

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Walker County is going to be included in a trauma trial being conducted by Regional Paramedical Services and the University of Alabama at Birmingham on behalf of the National Institutes of Health. Shannon Stevens, director of research in UAB's department of emergency medicine, made the announcement during a recent Jasper City Council meeting. Stevens said UAB is one of 10 centers in the country that received funding for the study, and RPS is one of 10 emergency medical services in the area that the university partners with to carry out such research. "They (RPS) have been an exemplary EMS agency to take the clinical science that is being worked on at UAB and get it from the lab to the general public," Stevens said. Stevens said the latest trial will help determine the best way to treat patients as they are being transported from the scene of an accident to a trauma center. Traditionally, trauma victims are given approximately a Coke-bottle sized amount of intravenous fluids before they arrive at the hospital. Stevens said researchers at UAB are now questioning whether that is too much. "We think giving them less fluid to keep from diluting the blood so that the viscosity stays thicker and you don't blow the clot would help increase the survival rate," he said. Stevens added that a similar study was held in Houston in the early 1990s with positive results. RPS manager Lee Wills said the trauma trial, which is set to begin soon, is one of several studies that local paramedics have conducted with assistance from UAB in the past few years. The organization still uses the information gleaned in a cardiac study that questioned the practice of using a defibrillator on patients before starting CPR. "When you shocked them immediately, it would go straight to a flatline and you would have to work that flatline. Because of the study, we found that if we came in and did a few minutes of CPR, it would get oxygen to the heart. Then we could defibrillate and the heart could come back," Wills said. Another current study is helping paramedics find evidence of internal injuries in trauma patients who otherwise feel fine and could be released from a hospital prematurely. Wills said he is pleased that RPS is able to stay on the cutting edge of new medical information because of the organization's relationship with UAB. "I think it's important that in Walker County we're learning the same thing people are learning in Seattle and New York at the same time whereas otherwise we might not have heard about it for five or 10 years down the road," Wills said.

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