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RPS taking part in UAB test study

Regional Paramedical Services is participating in a study with the University of Alabama at Birmingham to test new cardiac arrest treatments on patients before they reach the hospital.

UAB has been selected as one of 10 sites in the country for the federally funded Resuscitation Outcomes Consortium (ROC) study. Director of Operations David Waid of RPS, which provides life-support pre-hospital care and transportation, said this is the first time emergency medical services has been studied in pre-hospital care.

The study was prompted by the high rate of death due to cardiac arrest in the United States and especially Alabama, which has one of the nation's highest rates, according to Dr. Todd Brown, one of the researchers involved with the UAB experiment.

Cardiac arrest is one of the leading causes of death in the country and affects an estimated 500,000 people each year. Brown said the survival rate "in the best case scenario" is 10 to 15 percent.

"But in Alabama it's much less than that, maybe 2 to 5 percent," Brown said. "So if a person suffers from cardiac arrest they have about a one in 20 chance of survival, which is not good. The federal government has set aside \$50 million to study interventions that can improve survival in cardiac arrest and trauma. We have \$5 million earmarked for that at UAB."

The study involves new EMS strategies for treating a patient for cardiac arrest. The first part of the study concentrates on evaluating a breathing valve designed to increase blood flow to the heart during CPR. The second part involves determining the amount of CPR needed prior to defibrillation.

"We're training the EMS agencies. The paramedics, first-responders and basic EMTs will be trained," Brown said. "(RPS) already delivers the current standard of care. They are going to be trained to also deliver this experimental treatment, which we think will be better."

Patients are randomly chosen for experimental or standard treatment based on instructions from one of the new cardiac monitors RPS recently received, Brown said.

Brown said the ROC has received approval from Walker Baptist Medical Center to gather information on patients through its data.

The federal government normally requires full consent to be given by patients or family to perform research studies, said Brown. However, since cardiac arrest patients are unconscious at the time of treatment, and given the short amount of time available to treat the patient, the federal government has given permission to suspend the rule as long as the public is notified of the study.

"Treatment has to be delivered in the first few minutes," Brown said. "So the federal government has established a system or rule by which we can do this kind of exception. We have to notify the community and give the community opportunity to give us feedback."

"Only 2 or 3 percent survive under the old system. We're hoping this new system will be higher and save some lives as well."

Anyone choosing not to participate in the study may register for an opt-out option by requesting an opt-out bracelet through the UAB Web site.

According to Waid, the study will officially begin within a month and last for about five years.

Waid said RPS for the past several months has been participating in another study with ROC concerning critical trauma or head injury patients.

Waid said he and others with RPS are confident taking part in the studies.

"We feel it's important because we want to make sure what we're doing is the best for our patients," he said.

For questions or concerns contact Brown at toddbrown@uabmc.edu or Carolyn Williams, clinical research nurse coordinator for UAB, at 996-4982 or by email at cswilliams@uabmc.edu.

Also, Williams said anyone with questions concerning rights as a potential research participant should contact Sheila Moore, director of the Office of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use (IRB), at 934-3789, press the option for an operator or attendant and ask for extension 4-3789 between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Also, more information is available on the UAB Web site at www.uab.edu/arc.

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