

Rapid, coordinated response to people with chest pain symptoms is critical to successful treatment of heart attacks

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(Medical Xpress)— Patients wait too long after the onset of heart attack symptoms before seeking medical care, according to the Society of Cardiovascular Patient Care. Even with advancements at hospitals, patients must still quickly recognize the signs and symptoms of a heart attack and take the first step toward getting help—particularly in December and January, when heart attack deaths peak.

Accredited Chest Pain Centers, such as Rush University Medical Center, are especially well-prepared to respond quickly to a person experiencing chest pains. In order to become accredited by the Society of Cardiovascular Patient Care, hospitals must meet or exceed a wide set of stringent criteria and demonstrate commitment to reducing the time it takes to receive treatment, and increase the accuracy and effectiveness of treatment in a coordinated process that can save lives.

In 2009, Rush became the first academic medical center in Chicago to earn the accreditation and was recently reaccredited.

One of the criteria for accreditation is to significantly reduce the time it takes for a patient experiencing symptoms of a possible [heart attack](#) to see a physician, thus reducing the time to treatment during the critical early stages when treatments are most effective. In addition, hospitals must create more effective systems to get patients into the catheterization lab so a blocked [coronary artery](#) can be opened in the

shortest amount of time.

Another goal is to provide a specialized observation setting where physicians are better able to monitor patients when it is not clear whether they are having a heart attack. Such observation ensures that a patient is neither sent home too early nor needlessly admitted to the inpatient unit.

"Rush is committed to improving hospital response to heart attack victims. Minutes can make the difference between life and death," said Dr. Gary Schaer, cardiology director of the Rush Chest Pain Center.

"Rush is also committed to teaching the public to recognize and react to the early symptoms of a possible heart attack. Our coordinated team approach has resulted in Rush achieving a consistent door-to-balloon time of less than 90 minutes over the past 3 years."

This rapid response has reduced the time it takes from the patient's arrival in the emergency department to receiving angioplasty, an artery opening procedure. The American Heart Association recommends that the time from initially presenting to the ED to when the blocked artery is opened with an angioplasty procedure ("door to balloon time") should be less than 90 minutes. Each 30 minute delay in restoring blood flow increases the one-year mortality by 7.5 percent.

The accreditation process required close coordination between Rush's emergency department, cardiology, pharmacy, internal medicine and other departments throughout the medical center. To coordinate and implement the Chest Pain Center, Rush created a multi-disciplinary leadership committee consisting of physicians, nursing leaders, pharmacy, security, environmental services and others.

Heart attacks are the leading cause of death in the United States, with 600,000 dying annually of heart disease. More than five million Americans visit hospitals each year with chest pain.

"Everyone knows their job and works together in a supportive, respectful team environment to rapidly make decisions," said Dr. Yanina Purim-Shem-Tov, medical director of the Rush [Chest Pain](#) Center and an emergency medicine physician at Rush.

Provided by Rush University Medical Center

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