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Doctor uses NASCAR approach to save hearts

By Sun Times Staff

Three years ago, Collier County Medical Director Robert Tober, M.D., initiated an unorthodox approach to the treatment of patients in cardiac arrest known as the "pit-crew concept," which he modeled after the effectiveness of a NASCAR pit crew.

The treatment involves designating specific tasks to multiple responders, who are then choreographed to encourage and maintain a patient's blood flow during a cardiac arrest.

The unconventional approach, which progressed from a small trial group in 2004 to a refined county-wide standard of care that incorporates specialized equipment and extensive training, has already begun to produce phenomenal results and has placed the Collier County cardiac save rate at 59 percent (Jan. 1 to April 1, 2007), while the national average remains between six to 10 percent.

"A history of rapid response, coupled with state-of-the-art equipment and highly-trained personnel have propelled Collier County's resuscitation rates to a level higher than most areas throughout the globe," said Director Jeff Page, Emergency Medical Services Department. "As this program continues to develop, Collier County EMS hopes to break both national and international records for post-cardiac-arrest survival rates."

The pit-crew concept that helped produce these results relies heavily on four Advanced Life Support units that were added to EMS' inventory of equipment to help reduce response times. Additionally, staff received advanced training using a variety of cutting-edge technology, including the AutoPulse, King Laryngeal Tube and Rescue Pod devices.

Dr. Tober largely credits the success of Collier County's cardiac save rate to the continuous cardiac compression protocols developed at the University of Arizona's Sarver Heart Center under the direction of Gordon Ewy, M.D., as well as to the cooperative efforts among the county's police, fire and EMS staff for delivering unsurpassed life-saving care to the public.

"Without Dr. Ewy's ground-breaking research into what does and does not work in cardiac resuscitation, none of this would have been possible," said Dr. Tober. "The world owes Dr. Ewy a debt of gratitude for his tireless efforts, and I owe much of our success to the University of Miami School of Medicine's Center for Research in Medical Education under the spirited leadership of Dr. Michael Gordon, who has brought so many talents together from the worlds of cardiology and emergency medicine."

For more information call EMS Battalion Chief Helen Ortega at 354-2388 or visit www.colliergov.net/em.