

UCI Health www.ucihealth.com

WHEN EVERY MINUTE COUNTS

Studies show that heart attack patients who receive balloon angioplasty soon after arriving in an emergency room do better than those simply treated with clot-busting drugs.

But to ensure the best outcome, hospitals must be staffed and equipped to perform balloon angioplasty—also known as percutaneous cardiac intervention (PCI)—within 90 minutes of the time a heart-attack patient enters the doors of the emergency room.

As a result, the phrase “door-to-balloon time” has assumed vital importance at hospitals across the nation. “This method of unclogging arteries with a balloon-tipped catheter and inserting stents reduces the risk of a second heart attack significantly,” says

Dr. Chowdhury Ahsan, a UCI Medical Center cardiologist. “But timing is critical. The longer a patient’s heart is deprived of an adequate blood supply, the greater the damage to the heart muscle.”

Heart attacks are like forest fires. If they’re brought under control soon after they begin, there’s a very good chance of saving the entire forest.

To ensure that all heart attack patients have access to the best treatment, Orange County Emergency Medical Services recently designated a select group of hospitals as official cardiovascular receiving centers. UCI Medical Center was among the first in the area to receive this designation.

At UCI, treatment is like clockwork. “We’re prepared to care for the most critical cardiac cases without delay,” says Ahsan. From the moment a heart attack patient arrives in the Emergency Department, a dedicated team of cardiac specialists takes charge. Diagnosed, medicated and prepped, the patient is rushed to the hospital’s cardiac catheterization lab, which has been readied for the procedure. The PCI team awaits, ready to locate the blockage, clear the clogged artery, and keep it open permanently with a tiny wire cage called a stent. “Heart attacks are like forest fires,” says Ahsan. “If they’re brought under control soon after they begin, there’s a very good chance of saving the entire forest.”

An important advancement. Designated cardiovascular receiving centers represent an important advancement in the treatment of heart attacks. In the past, paramedics transported people suspected of suffering a heart attack to the nearest hospital. But many of these facilities were not equipped to perform PCI, which requires round-the-clock staffing and immediate access to high-tech equipment.

Today, however, paramedics are equipped with digital transmission and 12-lead electrocardiogram (EKG) monitors. Unlike the four leads on older EKG machines, this equipment gives a full picture of the heart’s electrical rhythm. When paramedics transmit an EKG to UCI Medical Center, emergency physicians and cardiologists review it immediately. “The diagnosis determines the destination,” says Ahsan. “Designated cardiovascular receiving centers provide the best and fastest treatment available.”

For an appointment with a UCI cardiologist, call 714-456-6699.

