



Feature Column

Towards A Healthier Arkansas

A Message from the Arkansas Department of Health

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What Will Happen in the Golden Hour?

(Little Rock –) Many Arkansans believe that if they or one of their family members were seriously injured in an automobile accident, emergency personnel would quickly take them to the best possible treatment center in the area to get the immediate help that they need – help that could mean the difference between life and death. Unfortunately, the truth is that we in Arkansas are not as well-prepared as we need to be to take the right steps without delay. What is lacking is a system that provides accurate, real-time information to those who have the responsibility to care for victims in an emergency.

What happens in “the golden hour,” the short time following a serious injury, can make all of the difference. Not only life and death issues are on the table, but the matters of quality of life and recovery time following serious injury can be profoundly affected by the timely actions and decisions made when everything is on the line.

Each year, several thousand Arkansans are either incapacitated or killed from traumatic injuries on the road, at home, at play or in the workplace. Costs to Arkansas are high in terms of years of potential life lost, inpatient and outpatient treatment costs and short- and long-term treatment expenses. Injury has been and remains the number one killer of Arkansans from ages one through 44. Trauma systems and designated trauma centers have proven to be vital elements to reduce injury-related hospitalizations, deaths and associated costs.

Arkansas, however, is the only state in the nation without a single designated level I or II trauma center and is one of only a few states without a functioning trauma system. Many deaths of Arkansans could be prevented if our state had a functioning trauma system. The necessity to transport victims as fast as possible to specialists at a designated trauma center is complicated in rural areas where rapid access may not be possible within an hour.

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The value of a trauma system is achieved through a seamless transition of each phase of care – pre hospital, hospital and rehabilitation services. Trauma systems also focus on injury prevention and preparedness within communities. Having a trauma system in place also improves the outcomes for non-injury emergencies, such as medical emergencies for stroke and cardiac patients. Emergency medical physicians diagnose a wide variety of conditions and perform rapid critical interventions to stabilize the patient. The key is having the right specialized physicians ready to treat those patients at the earliest possible opportunities in the right places.

Just this year, Governor Mike Beebe has made \$200,000 available from his Emergency Fund to help build what is called a “dashboard,” which makes it possible for the hospital that receives a seriously injured patient in its emergency room to find the closest hospital or specialist who can perform needed surgery or other procedures.

A trauma system in Arkansas will decrease the number of preventable deaths and reduce economic losses. According to recent studies, deaths from trauma should be reduced by 25 percent. Using 2005 data just for injuries involving motor vehicle crashes as an example, 168 lives would be saved by the statewide trauma system along with an estimated gross savings of \$193 million through reduced medical costs and productivity losses. -If a graduated driver’s license and primary seatbelt laws were to be enacted, an additional 38 lives per year would be saved and the costs savings would be an estimated \$44 million.

Find out more about a trauma system for Arkansas by calling the ADH Office of Emergency Medical Services and Trauma Systems, 501-661-2262, or by going to the website at <http://www.healthylarkansas.com/ems/> .

As the holiday celebrations begin, please practice safe driving habits and keep a watchful eye on your family members. My wish for you and your family is that you have a happy (and safe!) holiday season this year.

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