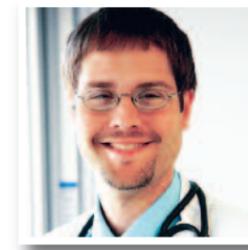


Matt Wilden, Attending Physician  
Assistant at  
Virginia Gay's Hospital's ED



# MERCY DRIVING STANDARDIZED *Heart Attack Protocols*

Knowing the very best, standardized protocols for handling cardiac alerts can make a critical difference – just ask Kevin Faas.



Mercy is the only hospital in the region and one of three hospitals in Iowa to receive Chest Pain Center accreditation.

The 52-year-old Vinton man knew he was having a heart attack in April when his wife, Deb, brought him to the Emergency Department (ED) at Virginia Gay Hospital in Vinton. Kevin Faas received excellent care, thanks to a new partnership between Mercy Medical Center and Virginia Gay.

Mercy is teaming up with community hospitals through its Regional Heart Attack Program to establish a streamlined, standardized process so heart attack patients are quickly identified. For emergency responders, having that protocol is critical to ensuring the best care. The simpler the protocol, the faster and more effective the care.

National guidelines for treating heart attacks have a clearly defined goal: to open a blocked artery within 90 minutes of arrival to the emergency department. Opening a blocked artery within 90 minutes reduces the likelihood of permanent heart muscle damage.

Clearing blocked arteries requires a cardiac catheterization lab, which most regional hospitals don't have. They transfer patients to a larger hospital, like Mercy, to initiate appropriate, life-saving care.

Kevin a truck driver, had experienced lower back problems for years. The pain sometimes shifted to his upper back, but it would pass. But that night in April, the pain was worse than ever and moved into his jaw and left arm.

"When I started to feel sick to my stomach, I said, 'that's it,'" he recalls. En route to the local hospital, the pain worsened until it felt like a pool cue ball was being pressed hard between his shoulder blades. Deb called ahead to alert the hospital of Kevin's symptoms.

"When I got there, they were all over me," Kevin says of Virginia Gay's ED team. "They knew exactly what they were doing. Then they got me in the ambulance and to Mercy right away."

In Mercy's catheterization lab, Kevin had a life-saving stent inserted to open a blocked heart artery.

"Mercy established its heart protocol team in June 2005, researching national standards on heart attack protocols," says Dr. Mark Pospisil, lead emergency physician on Mercy's team.

"We looked at our process to see what we could do to cut minutes off and get the EKG done as early as possible," he explains.

Helping regional hospitals initiate heart attack care is critical. This spring, Mercy's team began its outreach with Vinton. The Vinton-Mercy team completed the training just one week before Kevin's heart attack.

"They took such great care of him in Vinton," Dr. Pospisil adds. "It was the most dramatic case. Everything worked great."

Matt Wilden, attending physician assistant at Virginia Gay's ED that night, says the training has been a real asset.

**"They knew exactly what they were doing."**

*Kevin Faas  
Heart attack patient*

"I think it's good. It totally streamlines things," he says. "I am definitely pleased with the change it's allowed. It makes it a lot easier to get the patient taken care of as quickly as possible."

Mercy also works with Manchester Regional Medical Center. The regional partnerships include immediate feedback from the treating cardiologist to the referring hospital as soon as the artery is unblocked in the cardiac catheterization lab. All regional patients are referred back to their communities for important cardiac rehabilitation after a heart attack.

The team is now extending its outreach plan to include regional and county ambulance service crews. Fundraising efforts are underway to purchase life-saving equipment that will allow the county ambulance services to transmit EKGs directly to Mercy's emergency department from anywhere in the field.

"Receiving the EKG before the patient arrives saves precious time," Dr. Pospisil says. "The goal is to get the patient in and out of the ED in 30 minutes.

That sounds daunting, but it isn't if you can simplify your process.

Transmitting the EKG from the field immediately activates the whole team. Sometimes the heart attack team arrives before the patient even gets here."

As for Kevin, he now carries nitroglycerine, limits his truck driving to eight hours a day and considers himself lucky.

"I can't say enough about everybody here in Vinton and at Mercy who took care of me," Kevin says. "It was excellent all the way around."



Mercy is teaming up with community hospitals through its Regional Heart Attack Program to establish a standardized process to quickly identify heart attack patients, like 52-year-old Kevin Faas from Vinton.