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Local heart attack patient reunites today with paramedics

EDMONTON – An Edmonton woman reunites today with the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) team that recently saved her life after she collapsed at a local casino.

Sharon Smith has recovered from her heart attack and is visiting the Bonnie Doon EMS station to meet with the paramedics for the first time since they responded to her medical crisis.

“I was amazed by their professionalism and efficiency,” says Smith. “They used all their energy, skills and knowledge to manage my case and I wanted the opportunity to thank them.”

Smith was at the casino playing the slot machines on July 23 when she started to feel lightheaded. She decided to leave and the next thing she remembers is waking up on the floor of the casino.

Several of the casino employees quickly came to her aid and called 911. When paramedics arrived, Smith was awake and talking. All she wanted to do was get to her car and drive home but the paramedics convinced her she might be having a heart attack and should be examined.

“I felt no pain and was adamant that I wasn’t having a heart attack,” says Smith.

Once she was loaded into the ambulance and examined, which involved an electrocardiogram (ECG) test, it was clear Smith was having a heart attack. The team of paramedics quickly took action and used the Vital Heart Response (VHR) process.

Developed in Edmonton, VHR is a nationally and internationally recognized heart attack program dedicated to achieving the fastest time to treatment for patients using the best evidence available. A core group of dedicated physicians and staff support paramedic EMS teams and emergency department staff 24/7 to diagnose and treat heart attack cases.

“The aim of the VHR program is to treat all heart attack patients, regardless of their location or community, within 30 minutes of first medical staff contact using drug therapy, or within 90 minutes by cardiac catheterization,” says Dr. Ben Tyrell, a cardiologist at the CK Hui Heart Centre.

During this process, EMS crews that examine a patient with a suspected heart attack perform an ECG test and send the results to the program. A call is placed into the dedicated physician team on call and the findings are discussed. A decision is then made on how best to proceed on a case-by-case basis using either clot-busting medications or transfer to a Cardiac Catheterization Lab in Edmonton for angioplasty within 90 minutes of seeing a patient. The patient is monitored and treated through the entire process.

“Our goal as paramedics is to arrive at an emergency and initiate advanced medical care, often in life-threatening situations,” says Melissa Edwards, a public education officer with EMS. “It’s wonderful to reunite with a patient and see how he or she has progressed.”

Albertans who want to show their appreciation to EMS paramedics can send a thank-you note to www.thankaparamedic.com.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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