Emergency Angioplasty

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What is a heart attack

The heart is a muscle that pumps blood throughout the entire body and coronary arteries are blood vessels that supply blood to the heart. Coronary arteries are about the size of a strand of spaghetti and when its lining is healthy and has no blockages, blood flows through easily.

When the artery wall is damaged by high blood pressure or smoking, coronary artery disease begins to develop.

Over time, coronary artery disease can become more severe, when plaque (fat material) collects and starts to restrict blood flow in the artery. This buildup of plaque narrows the arteries, causing a decrease in the amount of blood flow to the heart.

Plaque can tear or completely block the artery, or a blood clot can block the narrow opening in the vessel. A heart attack, which is also known as myocardial infarction (MI), will then occur when one or more of the major arteries supplying blood to the heart becomes blocked, causing a part of the heart muscle to be damaged and stop working.

Emergency Angioplasty

During and immediately after suffering a heart attack, quick treatment is a patient’s best chance for survival and for minimizing damage to the heart. Time is muscle — heart muscle — and every minute counts. Through a partnership with the University of Maryland Heart Center, Carroll Hospital puts time on a patient’s side with an advanced, potentially life-saving procedure called percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI), also known as emergency angioplasty. Here is some information to help you understand the procedure and what to expect as you wait for your loved one to receive this life-saving treatment at the hospital.
Symptoms of a heart attack and risk factors

While symptoms vary from person to person, some warning signs that your loved one may have complained of include:

- Chest pressure (“feels like an elephant is sitting on my chest”)
- Indigestion
- Pain radiating to their neck, jaw, shoulders and arms
- Shortness of breath, sweating, nausea or lightheadedness

Heart attacks can be due to a number of risk factors, the most common include obesity, diabetes, smoking, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, age, family history and physical inactivity.

Why time matters for a heart attack patient arriving at the hospital

When a heart attack patient is brought to the hospital, time is muscle. Every minute counts for hospital staff to get your loved one to the cardiovascular lab to assist in getting the damaged area of the heart restored with blood flow with an emergency angioplasty or percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI).

How is emergency angioplasty performed?

Performed by a team of expert interventional cardiologists, percutaneous coronary intervention or emergency angioplasty is a procedure that involves inserting a balloon catheter over a thin wire across the blocked area of the coronary artery. The balloon is then inflated to compress and break up the plaque, which increases blood flow to the heart.

A stainless steel stent may also be inserted inside the coronary artery to hold the artery open and maintain blood flow. Specialized drug eluting stents also can be used which help to decrease future buildup of plaque by releasing medications inside the patient over a period of time. The interventional cardiologist will determine the type of stent to be used.

What to expect after surgery?

Following an emergency angioplasty, a patient will remain in the hospital until her or she is stable, usually a minimum of two to three days, and instructions from our interventional cardiologist for further treatments will be recommended. Treatments may include:

Bypass surgery: In cases where further intervention is required such as bypass surgery, the patient will be transferred to a specialty hospital for care. Bypass surgery is a procedure that corrects blood flow to the heart when angioplasty is unable to do so effectively. During this type of procedure, a surgeon uses a vein from the leg, mammary artery or forearm to attach to the aorta, located in the heart. This reroutes the supply of blood around the blockage and subsequently restores blood flow. The number of blockages where blood has been rerouted determines the number of bypasses.

Medications: Medications such as aspirin may be prescribed to reduce the risk of another heart attack occurring. Medications can help to slow the patient’s heart rate, which results in expanding blood vessels or lowering blood pressure and cholesterol levels.
**Cardiac Rehabilitation Program:** Carroll Hospital’s cardiac rehabilitation program is a valuable resource to help patients restore and improve their physical activity after a heart attack. Certified by the American Association of Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Rehabilitation, the program combines exercise, education and support to help patients achieve a heart-healthy lifestyle. It consists of a board-certified physician and specially-trained cardiac nurses and technicians to help patients reach their highest level of activity and sense of well-being. For more information about cardiac rehabilitation, call 410-871-6741.

**What you can do to help a loved one after a heart attack**

Family members can help a patient reduce his or her risk factors for heart attack in a variety of ways such as encouraging him or her to stop smoking, eat heart healthy foods, exercise and attend follow-up appointments.

*If you have any questions during your loved one’s stay at the hospital, please do not hesitate to ask. You may use the space on the next page to write your questions down to help you remember what to ask the physician or nurse on duty.*