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Hospital 911 calls

ED DONEY REPORTING

OKLAHOMA CITY -- We hear police, fire, and emergency crews communicating all the time on our scanners. Occasionally we hear ambulances responding to a 911 call, from a hospital. As hospitals have become more specialized in their services, not all of them are capable of handling every emergency, but some say the benefits of specialty care far outweigh the potential problems.

"Does that hurt to twist either way?" Dr. Warren Low asks a patient.

"Not bad, no," the patient replies.

Dr. Warren Low is an orthopedic surgeon at McBride Clinic; a facility that specializes in dealing with bones and arthritis.

He says McBride gives orthopedic patients the kind of cutting-edge treatment that they won't find in general "do everything" hospitals.

"In our hospital, if we want a piece of equipment, we decide one day, and we order it the next day," Dr. Low explains.

Like many specialty hospitals, Dr. Low says there are emergency situations where a patient has to be transported to another facility.

If a patient has cardiac problems, for example, McBride has arrangements to work with the Oklahoma Heart hospital at a moment's notice.

Dr. Low says, "Even though that's not the specialty at our hospital, those specialists will come to our hospital and see those patients if they have those problems."

"You can be in the middle of a complex neurological procedure and your patient has a heart attack. It happens," says Shawn Rogers, EMS Director.

Rogers is the EMS Director for the State Department of Health. He says not all hospitals are created equal.

In fact, of Oklahoma County's 31 hospitals, only eight are "full service." The rest are specialized.

In an emergency, our tendency is to go to the first hospital we see, but experts say that's where some people get into the most trouble.

Rogers explains that, "It's difficult for the public to know where to go and it's really up to the system. That's why they call 911, they call the experts and the paramedics transport them to the right place."

The experts are trying to keep up with the growing number of specialty facilities as well. Ambulances now use a live "status board" to take patients to the right place based on their emergency. It shows what a hospital can and can't do; as well as their ability to take on any new patients.

Frank Gresh is EMSA's Chief Information Officer. He says, "Moving patients between hospitals, specialty hospitals, and general hospitals, doesn't really matter. It's not something that's uncommon. It's become more prevalent from time to time, now, with more specialty hospitals, but that's to be expected."

"All hospitals are required to have transfer agreements," says Craig Jones, with the Oklahoma Hospital

Association.

The Oklahoma Hospital Association says the public needs to become an informed consumer and should know before any surgical procedure what a hospital is capable of handling, and what emergency plan they have.

"And yes, I know that I may have a complication that they can't handle. As long as they know that, they need to know that, well, if that is to arise, this is game plan B," Jones says.

Among the hospitals with the highest percentage of emergency ambulance requests from 2006 were:
VALIR, which is a long-term rehab hospital.
Kindred, which also deals with patients requiring high levels of care.
Northwest Surgical Hospital
Canadian Valley and Edmond Medical Center round out the top five.

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