

## **SFMH House Calls**

A new partnership throughout the Champlain Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) is a global leader in saving lives and reducing health care costs at the same time.

Dr. Michael Lemay, a cardiologist at the University of Ottawa Heart Institute, outlined the new STEMI program at the Renfrew Victoria Hospital Board last week.

St. Francis Memorial Hospital is a partner in the program, which provides a rapid and coordinated response for heart attack sufferers throughout the region.

“I think we probably have one of the best systems in the world,” said Dr. Lemay. “This is an example of how the health care system can work really well.”

The STEMI protocol sets out local hospitals’ initial response, which includes administering thrombolytic drugs, or “clot-busters”, with direct referral to the Heart Institute, where the insertion of a stent completes the medical response by keeping the artery open. Paramedics are also key players in the regional response protocol.

Dr. Lemay’s passion for the program shines through as he describes the regional network that has developed, which he believes is the first of its kind in Canada. He notes that the STEMI program was highlighted as one of the top five in the world during a recent conference he attended in Miami.

“I know we service our patients very well. We work very well with our community,” he says. “We’ve had a lot of champions,” he adds, pointing to the health care providers at the Heart Institute and in the partnering community hospitals.

Dr. Lemay is a pioneer in the field of response to acute heart attacks. He was inspired early in his career by a colleague in Atlanta, Georgia who actually invented the angioplasty (balloon treatment) technique by experimenting with balloons and wires in his kitchen.

Thrombolytic medications came into vogue shortly after angioplasty was introduced, and Dr. Lemay has helped lead the way in combining the two approaches.

He explained that the key to success is to get blocked arteries open as quickly as possible to provide nourishment to heart muscles that are actually dying during a heart attack. That window of opportunity is approximately six hours.

The STEMI protocol is exciting for a variety of reasons:

- It combines the benefits of both responses. The clot-busters are a good primary intervention, because they do not require a sophisticated cath lab with its

- specialized equipment and highly-skilled staff. The quick follow-up with angioplasty and a stent provides a long-term and effective solution.
- Mortality from acute heart attacks in Ottawa has dropped from 10% to 5% since the STEMI program began.
  - STEMI patients spend a short time in hospital, significantly reducing the costs of care.

The program continues to grow. A dedicated STEMI clinic will open at the Heart Institute this fall, providing standardized follow-up treatment for patients throughout the LHIN.

Dr. Lemay expects the clinic will improve communication between the patients, their family physicians and the cardiologists, helping to improve ongoing heart health.

“This is a great example of how our patients benefit when we all work together and build our strengths,” comments Randy Penney, CEO of both St. Francis and Renfrew Victoria Hospitals. “We are proud to be part of this leading-edge program, which is integrated health care at its best.”