Lincoln Hospital, partners, win quality award

(June 2008) Time flies when you're having a heart attack. With Lincoln Hospital's Level One Cardiac Care program, that time saved has equated to lives saved. Because of this success, Level One has won the prestigious Qualis Health Award of Excellence in Healthcare Quality.

"Together with partners Sacred Heart Medical Center and Northwest MedStar Critical Care Transport, Lincoln Hospital was the first in our region to activate the new cardiac emergency protocol that was pioneered in Minnesota," says hospital administrator Tom Martin noting that getting cardiologists, two hospital ER's, physicians, nursing staff, technicians and transport specialists all to agree to be accountable to each other -- to standardize and improve how they can expedite care -- was a tremendous achievement.

"This partnership," says Martin, "demonstrated that we can get a rural heart attack patient into the cath lab in Spokane as quickly, and in some cases, quicker than the patients can get to the cath lab from a Spokane ER. This brings a major improvement in access from rural communities to these life saving specialty units."

Qualis Health is a private, nonprofit organization which helps medical centers, physicians, insurance companies and community groups collaborate on health care quality initiatives. Under a federal contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Qualis Health also serves as the Quality Improvement Organization for Washington and Idaho.

Lincoln Hospital is honored that this ground breaking program has captured the attention of hospitals across the nation. "And, Level One is spreading across the state of Washington like wildfire," says Martin. "Rural patients are getting the immediate access to top cardiac care that they need."

Martin says the doctors and staff at Lincoln Hospital have worked tirelessly to make this a top quality program, but E.R. Chief Ralph Monteagudo says its success is also largely due to the people of Lincoln County.

"When the cardiac experts at Sacred Heart Medical Center told residents of Lincoln County to come to Lincoln Hospital first when experiencing chest pain, Lincoln County listened," says Dr. Monte. "People now know that getting to the nearest hospital for fast diagnosis and stabilization is the key."

Level One was implemented in the spring of 2007 as a collaboration between Lincoln Hospital, Sacred Heart Medical Center and Northwest MedStar. Since that time, 14 rural hospitals have signed on to the program statewide.

Because of the success of the Level One Cardiac program, the State Department of Health has asked Lincoln Hospital to again partner up with Sacred Heart and MedStar to do a similar program for stroke.

"As with heart attack, time is the key to surviving a stroke," says Dr. Monte. "We're currently putting the medical protocols in place and hope to have the program up and running this fall. With so many miles between rural patients and a major stroke center, this program is needed to give us back some of those precious minutes lost to distance."