

UW Health: Trains local EMS to utilize new life-saving technology for older children

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MADISON, Wis. – A life-changing technology to save people in cardiac arrest is now available at UW Health for children as young as 13.

This technology, extracorporeal membrane oxygenation, commonly referred to as ECMO, relies on close communication with frontline workers like emergency medical services personnel (EMS) to activate this process in a timely manner on the scene of an emergency.

UW Health is collaborating with area first responder agencies to help them recognize when a child with a near adult-size body qualifies for this life-saving technology and prepare the patient for the ECMO procedure upon arrival at the emergency department, according to Dr. Josh Glazer, assistant professor of emergency medicine, UW School of Medicine and Public Health, and UW Health emergency medicine and critical care physician.

“Leveraging ECMO for patients who suffer cardiac arrest – also called extracorporeal cardiopulmonary resuscitation, or ECPR – can significantly increase the chances of neurologically-intact survival; that is, returning home as the same functional person they were before this terrible, unexpected event,” he said.

The ECMO technology, which has been available for adults for several years, works by acting in the place of a patient’s heart to keep blood flowing throughout their body in the event of a cardiac arrest when the heart stops pumping blood effectively.

In pediatric patients, potential causes could be hypothermia like submersion in cold water in wintertime, accidental overdose on medications or an arrhythmia in which the heart cannot beat effectively, Glazer said.

Saving a child in such dire circumstances relies on trust, communication and incredible coordination between the prehospital and hospital teams, according to Brian Goff, chief, Sun Prairie EMS.

UW Health and Sun Prairie EMS recently performed a field training facilitated by the UW Health Clinical Simulation Program with a sophisticated mannequin to simulate a pediatric patient in cardiac arrest in the village of Windsor and then transported the “patient” to University Hospital where a team of doctors and nurses were waiting to implement the ECMO procedure.

“Without the training for our emergency medical technicians on the scene, ECMO at the hospital wouldn’t be possible,” Goff said. “It’s partnerships like our relationship with UW Health and the trust these training sessions build that facilitate this life-saving work.”

Glazer and Goff are available for interviews today. B-roll and recorded interviews with Glazer, Goff, Dr. Michael Lohmeier, associate professor, UW School of Medicine and Public Health, and medical director, Sun Prairie EMS, and Brian Vaughn and Jeff Matt, paramedics, Sun Prairie EMS, are also available.