



## NEWS RELEASE

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 5, 2011

## FRASER HEALTH AND BC AMBULANCE SERVICE TEAM UP TO HELP HEART ATTACK PATIENTS FAST

**CHILLIWACK** – When someone experiences a severe heart attack, a quick medical response can be a matter of life or death. Minutes really do count.

To deliver the best care possible, Fraser Health and B.C. Ambulance Service have joined forces to provide rapid response helicopter service to airlift critical cardiac patients from the Chilliwack and Fraser Canyon areas for treatment at Royal Columbian Hospital – the region’s trauma and tertiary cardiac centre in New Westminster. The Royal Columbian has one of the largest acute myocardial infarct programs in Canada since inception in 2003.

Until recently, heart attack patients from the eastern Fraser Valley were first transported by road to either Fraser Canyon Hospital (FCH) or Chilliwack General Hospital (CGH) before being transferred to Royal Columbian Hospital (RCH), where cardiac specialists perform angioplasty or other life-saving intervention. However, land transportation in an ambulance to RCH from eastern Fraser Valley communities can take 90 minutes to more than two hours if the roads are congested.

Now, under a new joint BCAS and Fraser Health program, called the STEMI Launch Protocol, a helicopter crew can transport a heart attack patient from Hope or Chilliwack to RCH in under 30 minutes.

The protocol includes the participation of a team of on-ground BCAS primary (PCP) and advanced care paramedics (ACP), critical care flight paramedics (CCP), Victoria and Vancouver air dispatch crews and Helijet Airways.

Once critical heart attack patients are identified in the field by BCAS Advanced Care paramedics, Helijet pilots are alerted to rendezvous at airfields near Fraser Canyon Hospital in Hope or in Chilliwack. Once in flight, critical care paramedics accompany the patient to administer necessary monitoring and treatment. Meanwhile, Royal Columbian Hospital medical crews are notified to prepare to take the patient and receive critical information about the patient’s status, including information from electrocardiogram (ECG) readings that are taken by paramedics in the field and transmitted directly to RCH. While in flight, the cardiac team can prepare the cathlab suite for the patient’s arrival.

Due to Fraser Health’s large geographical area, the STEMI launch program will cut transport time to a fraction while significantly increasing a patient’s chances of full recovery and survival. The team’s fast response can help minimize damage to the heart and improve outcomes for the patient. This means less time spent in the hospital and a better recovery, and it may even mean the difference between life and death for some patients.

The STEMI Launch Protocol also means that nurses and physicians from FCH and ambulance crews who transport these patients to RCH will now be away for much shorter time periods, allowing them to be more quickly available to other patients who may need care.

The STEMI Launch program started May 25, 2011 and has thus far transported six patients to Royal Columbian for critical cardiac care.

Fraser Health provides a wide range of integrated health services to the largest and fastest growing population in B.C. The health authority is committed to improving the health of the population and the quality of life of more than 1.6 million people living in communities from Burnaby to White Rock to Hope.



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### Quotes:

#### **John Les, MLA Chilliwack**

"This new protocol put in place by Fraser Health and B.C. Ambulance Services will save lives in the eastern Fraser Valley where heart attack patients will benefit from having quick access to the cardiac specialists at Royal Columbia Hospital, which is more than 100 kilometers away for some communities."

#### **Barry Penner, MLA Chilliwack-Hope**

"This new partnership protocol between Fraser Health and B.C. Ambulance Services means that the specialized care available at Royal Columbian Hospital is quickly available to those who need it most, even in our most remote communities."

#### **Dr. Nigel Murray, President and CEO, Fraser Health**

"This is a significant step forward for our region assuring that all of Fraser Health's population has access to the best care possible for patients suffering heart attacks."

#### **Dr. Gerald Simkus, Medical Program Director, Cardiac Service, Fraser Health**

"Time is of the essence when someone is having a heart attack. The sooner that you can get somebody who has started having a heart attack to where they need to be to unblock the artery disease causing a heart attack the better off they will be."

#### **Dr. Karen Wanger, Vice President, Medical Programs, BC Ambulance Service**

"BCAS is proud to be working in partnership with Fraser Health to deliver the STEMI Launch Protocol Program," said Wanger. "This program is another example of our commitment to provide a rapid response and high quality care to critical cardiac patients."

### Backgrounder:

- Royal Columbian Hospital in New Westminster is a tertiary care hospital, where cardiac specialists perform angioplasty, surgery and other life-saving treatments.
- Heart attacks (also known as myocardial infarctions) occur when a coronary artery becomes blocked, causing some of the heart muscle being supplied by that artery to begin to die due to blood loss).
- Heart attacks are divided into two types, according to their severity. A STEMI, or an ST-segment elevation myocardial infarction, is the more serious and life-threatening type of heart attack.
- During a STEMI event, the flow of blood through a coronary artery to the heart is blocked. As a result the heart muscle being supplied by the affected artery is starved of blood and starts to die. Fast intervention to regain the flow of blood can save heart tissue from damage, and this also generally means a faster recovery for the patient.

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