

# Speed is key when it comes to chest pain

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IVN Senior Contributing Writer

Illinois Valley Fire District (IVFD) Chief Dennis Hoke was out of town when he received a phone call from a local business owner in the Valley who said: "I think I'm having a heart attack, will you come over?"

Hoke immediately called 911 dispatch and sent in his crews. A medical helicopter was called in and just as Hoke's friend was being wheeled into the hospital, he went into cardiac arrest. He was revived at the scene and then put into a drug-induced coma to increase his chances for survival.

"The first lesson here is not to call your friends, family or neighbors," said Hoke, who is also a paramedic. "If you're having heart symptoms, call 911 immediately. The faster we can do an intervention, the less damage is done to the heart. Once you've had that heart attack there is going to be damage, so the key is to try and minimize it and stop that damage as soon as possible. You have to get to a hospital right away that can do a cardiac intervention - and some of those patients have to get to Medford. Minutes count. Literally, time is heart muscle. You're losing heart muscle during a heart attack - and that's going to cause the long term damage."

Hoke explained how this man had been under a lot of stress and had experienced left arm pain for about two weeks. Hoke had talked to him at a recent community meeting, inquiring about his health, because "he didn't look right. But he denied any issues at that time."

"That's the second lesson here. Don't ignore symptoms," Hoke said. "Get checked out. The symptoms of cardiac problems can be so subtle that people just ignore them, and

what I've learned is that denial is one of the biggest contributors of untimely death from heart trouble."

According to Hoke, men and women can present symptoms quite differently. With men, a heart attack can feel like an elephant is sitting on their chest, and there might be pain in the left arm and the jaw. Those are the classic symptoms. However Hoke said some men - and women - can present symptoms differently: it could be long bout of indigestion, or pain in the right arm.

"Women can have the same symptoms

as men, but oftentimes, they might have flu-like symptoms, like body aches, nausea, general malaise, lack of energy, a 'blah' feeling," said Siskiyou Community Health Center's family practitioner Dr. Hunt. "If you possess the risk factors and medical history that could indicate heart trouble, then you shouldn't wait to be seen by a doctor, whereas a young woman in her 20s could wait a few days and see if it passes."

The medical professionals say women might also experience lightheadedness, extreme fatigue, fainting, dizziness, or pressure in the upper back; and both men and women might

experience shortness of breath, sweating, belching or indigestion.

Hunt also agreed with Hoke about not waiting to be seen by a doctor when experiencing any of these symptoms. "Early intervention is so important. If you catch it soon enough, the damages from heart attacks may be reversible," she said.

Aiding the effort to get Valley residents timely medical treatment, a new helipad was installed at the Selma Fire Station. Hoke said Mercy Flights bankrolled the project and Dave Anderson did the excavation work beforehand.

He also said Bill Dodson, Bob Knott, Skip Bernard, Tony Paulson, Larry Hammersmith, Jeff Gavlik, Joe Latva, Tom McCauley, and Kris Sherman all pitched in to get the job done.

"Bob Bell and Ron Humphres rallied a number of citizens from the Illinois Valley to make this a reality," Hoke said. "This will greatly improve landing zone safety for the aircraft, emergency personnel and the patients. It was a cool project with a bunch of community members - many not related to the fire district - who just came together to get something good done for the community."



(Photo by the IVFD Media Dept)

Volunteers work laying concrete Wednesday, March 30, at the Selma fire station. The section of the concrete poured is one section of a landing pad for Mercy Flights helicopter that many heart attack victims will use.

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