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Fighting deadly sepsis when every minute counts

Hospitals receive special training through mobile lab

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Dameron Hospital nurse Abel Rodriguez, left, physician's assistant Philip DaVisio and nurse Chad Lutz simulate treating a mannequin patient in a mobile training lab at the hospital Wednesday.

MICHAEL MCCOLLUM/The Record

By **Joe Goldeen**
Record Staff Writer
May 22, 2011 12:00 AM

STOCKTON - Nurses and emergency physicians from three Stockton-area hospitals underwent training last week in a specialized mobile unit on how to more quickly identify sepsis and begin appropriate treatment.

With sepsis, once diagnosed, every minute counts in the effort to save the patient's life. It's a severe and often deadly illness in which the bloodstream is overwhelmed by bacteria, and it's not the easiest condition to diagnose in its early stages.

While people of all ages can be infected in any setting, it can attack hospitalized patients through intravenous lines, surgical wounds and bedsores. It can affect children and adults in their bones, bowels, lungs, organs, skin, even the lining of the brain, where it's known as meningitis.

Preventing sepsis

The risk of sepsis, a severe infection in which the bloodstream is overwhelmed by bacteria, can be reduced by following the recommended immunization schedule, especially for children. Careful hand-washing procedures and care of medical equipment can help prevent hospital-related

"It's one of the top leading causes of death in the hospital. It really confounds other disease processes," said Janine Hawkins, chief nursing officer at Stockton's Dameron Hospital, which helped organize and host the SimSuite Mobile Simulation Lab.

Hawkins said that to her knowledge, there is nothing to indicate that the rate of sepsis in hospitals is any higher in San Joaquin County than any other areas.

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infections that lead to sepsis.
— National Center for Biotechnology Information

"It's under the radar. We try to identify it early, but the symptoms are vague. You can miss the early signs, but the patient can end up on a ventilator in the intensive care unit," she said. Early symptoms

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can include a slight fever, increased heart rate and decreasing blood pressure. "But the way we identify it is with the lactic acid blood test." And that, she said, takes a little time.

The mobile lab, based in Denver, was brought to Stockton for the week through the Hospital Council of Northern and Central California's Beacon Patient Safety Collaborative, funded by Anthem Blue Cross.

Dameron personnel were joined by medical staff members from St. Joseph's Medical Center and San Joaquin General Hospital to get hands-on training with a lifelike mannequin dubbed "Flanders" programmed to go into severe septic shock.

The nurses and doctors had to react in real time during their three-hour training sessions or they could lose the patient.

"If they don't go through the protocol, the patient will get worse," Hawkins said.

The nurses and doctors are expected to share what they learned with their colleagues.

"All the staffs did have (interactive computer-based) training before they came into the simulator. It's about training the trainers," Hawkins said.

Dameron staffers thought it was a valuable experience.

"It reaffirms the things we're doing here. It gives us reassurance we're doing things right," emergency nurse Chad Lutz said.


"The team approach to sepsis care is key. You need to be able to identify it quickly and handle the flow" of activity involved in treatment, said Phil Da Visio, a physician's assistant at Dameron.

"The end objective is that the patient gets the fastest care and lives are saved," said Scott Seamons of the Hospital Council, who observed Wednesday's training session.

Contact reporter Joe Goldeen at (209) 546-8278 or jgoldeen@recordnet.com. Visit his blog at recordnet.com/goldeenblog.

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