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BEST hospital if you have a heart attack

Suburban Hospital



Suburban is the place to go if you have heart problems.

JOHN KEITH PHOTOGRAPHY

When you've had a heart attack, time is of the essence. The faster you are diagnosed and treated, the more likely you are to survive and fully recover. Richard Slechta of Bethesda can attest to that.

In April, Slechta, 72, called 911 complaining of chest pains. After the ambulance arrived, it took only 59 minutes for him to get to Suburban Hospital, receive an electrocardiogram, be whisked into the catheter lab and have his clogged artery reopened. "They did a fantastic job. I can vouch for that," Slechta says.

It has been a little more than a year since the opening of the NIH Heart Center at Suburban Hospital, a partnership between the National Institutes of Health and Suburban (8600 Old Georgetown Road, Bethesda, 301-896-3100, www.suburbanhospital.org). Already, the reviews are good. Last summer, Suburban was recognized on the Medicare and Medicaid public Web site as one of only 17 hospitals in the country—the only one in the Washington area—to score better than the national standard for treating heart attacks and preventing death.

At the heart center, NIH and Suburban doctors treat heart patients with cutting-edge medicine and technologies, some of which were developed across the street at NIH. "NIH was interested in learning how to... evaluate the use of MRIs in diagnosing heart attack and stroke in emergency room patients. Suburban had an emergency room with 20 years experience and an interest in improving the quality of the treatment," says Dr. Eugene Passamani, senior vice president for research and education at Suburban and a former NIH scientist. "The marriage was made."

Brian Gragnolati, president and CEO of Suburban, says the short distance between NIH and the hospital make the partnership hard to resist. "Our geography is our destiny," he says.

The NIH Heart Center's goal for cardiac emergencies is to get patients from the door to balloon (angioplasty) in under 90 minutes. "If you have the process down and people know their roles, things work smoothly," says Dr. Robert Rothstein, director of emergency medicine at Suburban.

Sometimes it's not efficiency or technology that make the difference. In 2007, Howard Gilson, 56, of Bethesda, went to Suburban complaining of chest pain. An avid Red Sox fan, he had ignored heart attack warning signs in order to attend a BoSox game at Camden Yards. Expecting another angioplasty (he had one in 1999), he was not prepared for cardiothoracic surgeon Dr. Philip Corcoran's diagnosis: triple bypass surgery.

When Gilson reported a post-op problem while recovering at home, Corcoran stopped at Gilson's house on his way home from the hospital. "Physicians don't do house calls, let alone a thoracic surgeon," Gilson says. "It was a genuine, compassionate follow-up call. ... I don't think anybody enjoys [bypass surgery], but I am glad I did it there."

OTHER TOP VOTE GETTERS:

Washington Hospital Center • Sibley Memorial Hospital

BEST hospital if you have cancer

Johns Hopkins Hospital

Suburban Hospital

Georgetown University Hospital

Sibley Memorial Hospital

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