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Hoover police tackle cardiac arrest

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Hoover police will be dispatched to cardiac arrest calls along with the city's fire and rescue service under a new team approach started this week to quicken response times and boost survival rates.

The combination approach allows the closest police officer to respond to such a call and perform CPR if he or she arrives before advanced life support personnel do, said Lt. Rusty Lowe, the city's emergency medical services officer.

Hoover's police officers have been recertified in CPR recently and are trained up to the current standard, Lowe said. In the past, fire and rescue workers would go out to cardiac calls, but not necessarily police officers, he said.

"The quicker we can get a trained person on the scene to do CPR, the greater the chance of survival," Lowe said. "Police are trained but have never really been utilized. It's never really been a structured response."

Cardiac arrest is the sudden, abrupt loss of heart function. The victim may or may not have been diagnosed with heart disease. Sudden death (also called sudden cardiac death) occurs within minutes after symptoms appear, according to the American Heart Association. Early CPR and rapid defibrillation, combined with early advanced care, can result in high long-term survival rates for cardiac arrests that are witnessed, the organization says.

CPR, rhythmic chest compressions, can help maintain blood pressure and flow until more advanced treatments can be tried. CPR is the standard first aid response to someone suffering cardiac arrest.

A 2008 study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association showed the survival rate for cardiac arrests that occur outside of a hospital at 3 percent for Alabama.

Lowe said the average response time in Hoover to a cardiac call is four to five minutes. Emergency medical dispatchers also provide CPR instructions to people who make emergency calls.

Both police Chief Nick Derzis and fire Chief Chuck Wingate embraced the concept of joint response wholeheartedly.

"We know that time is so crucial in calls like this," Derzis said. "If we can get on the scene quicker, that's all the more better."

Derzis said the department's 165 officers are trained in CPR and underwent recertification in the last 45 days.

Wingate said the patrol dispatch approach is a testament to the good working relationship between the two

departments. "This is a program that seems to be a win-win for Hoover citizens," Wingate said.

Lowe said Hoover is constantly researching ways to increase a patient's chances of survival.

"I believe this is going to save lives or give us the peace of mind to know that we did absolutely everything possible to save a person's life," Lowe said.

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