

McCall Star News, Friday, Oct. 21, 2011 – by Michael Wells (2 pages)

Hospital staff swings into action as 7 wreck victims arrive

St. Luke's McCall invokes procedures for dealing with crises

When the call came into the St. Luke's McCall emergency room last week that seven victims from an auto accident near Riggins were on their way, the hospital was ready to respond.

Eight people from Potlatch in northern Idaho were injured in a one-vehicle accident six miles south of Riggins on Oct. 12, Idaho County Sheriff's Office Deputy Fred Carey said.

Seven of the injured people, including two infants, were taken in three ambulances to St. Luke's McCall and the eighth victim was flown by air ambulance to St. Alphonsus Regional Medical Center in Boise.

The driver, Brad Poe, 37, was cited for inattentive driving when he drove a 1998 Dodge Caravan off the northbound lane of U.S. 95 about 12:50 p.m., Carey said.

The van drove 375 feet off the highway where it struck a driveway that was perpendicular to the highway, which launched the van into the air, Carey said. The vehicle was in the air for about 30 feet, then landed and rolled on its side, trapping three of the passengers inside, Carey said.

Kristen Blevins, 21, was taken by air ambulance to St. Alphonsus from the scene of the accident, Carey said. Blevins was in stable condition Tuesday afternoon, a St. Alphonsus spokesperson said.

Ambulances from Riggins and Meadows Valley transported the other seven passengers to St. Luke's McCall.

Call Starts Staff In Motion

The hospital's emergency department received a call from the EMS commander responding to the accident. "We knew we would receive seven patients, none of whom were known to be in critical condition," said Jan Appel, a registered nurse at St. Luke's McCall.

The hospital sent an intercom message requesting all departments send a representative to the nursing station for a briefing, called a medical huddle, St. Luke's McCall spokesperson Lyle Nelson said. The briefing identifies the people available in the hospital and the equipment that will be needed to handle the emergency, Nelson said.

"At this particular moment, we also had a (baby) delivery in progress," Appel said.

The hospital has to prepare for nearly every conceivable event involving a single person to scores of people, said Eve Riley, St. Luke's McCall director of the emergency department.

“From car accidents, mass exposure to hazardous materials, snake bites, unconscious infants, to seizures and heart attacks - we prepare a protocol to manage, treat, and transport patients as needed,” Riley said.

Hospital staff, along with emergency department physician Terri Mucha, decided to call in family medicine physician Jen Gray and orthopedic surgeon Greg Irvine to help with the incoming patients. “I determined we had sufficient nursing staff on site,” Mucha said. “We want the ideal mix and number of people on the team.”

Social worker Jennifer Caple and volunteer chaplain Michael Pedersen were summoned to help with family notifications and arranging support for the younger victims, Nelson said.

Registered nurse Dianne Robinson was assigned to coordinate patient flow and sort the patients according to treatment needed. “It’s essential to determine which patients need the most immediate care and to assign them to a room and physician,” Robinson said.”

Radiology Was Busy

Outside of the emergency department, the hospital’s medical imaging department was busiest, Nelson said.

“We had to perform numerous X-ray, CT and ultrasound exams in the right priority, on the right patient, in the right place,” said Bill Colpo, the hospital’s medical imaging director. “Constant communication with the emergency room and calm thinking are key.”

It took five hours for all patients to be fully diagnosed, treated, and provided with follow-up orders for further care, Nelson said.

Only two of the seven patients required further treatment beyond the emergency response.

Poe, the driver, was transported from St. Luke’s McCall by air ambulance to St. Alphonsus, where he was in critical condition Tuesday afternoon.

Melissa Vance, 40, of Potlatch was admitted to St. Luke’s McCall and was in fair condition on Tuesday afternoon.

The accident victims treated and released from St. Luke’s McCall were: Skylar Blevins, infant; Autum Blevins, no age given; Brittany Poe, 9; Deshawn Poe, no age given; and Jessica Blevins, 19, all of Potlatch.

“I was pleased with the overall performance of the entire team,” Mucha said. “Providing emergency medicine during a multi-person injury requires a team approach and clear, concise communication.”