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Published: Friday, March 04, 2005



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## Listening to the needs of their patients

### Lynnwood, Edmonds medics are one of only two units in nation testing new heart attack technology

By Shannon Sessions  
Lynnwood / Mountlake Terrace Enterprise editor

Shh ... listen ... are you having a heart attack?

Lynnwood and Edmonds paramedics are one of only two medic units in the nation who just started testing new technology that may hear if a person is having a heart attack -- even before they're showing signs of one.

The technology is called Audicor, and it is a computer that is installed inside each of the medic units. While the technology has been used in emergency rooms all over the country for awhile, it is now being tested in the field to show how the noise surrounding it affects the test result, said Greg Macke, medical services administrator for the two city's

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Enterprise/SHANNON SESSIONS  
Lynnwood paramedic Vince Schweitzer holds a printout Sunday, Feb. 20, that shows a heart in early stages of a heart attack from the new Audicor study. The Lynnwood and Edmonds medics are one of only two medic units in the world testing the new technology.

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medic units, which formerly was called Medic 7. A medic unit in Florida was the first and only other chosen study group.

Macke said the Audicor actually listens to your heart-- sounds the human ear can't always hear.

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"This is good because when the heart's under stress the sounds it makes changes," Macke said. "So with the Audicor we can get early signs of heart failure, and it would even show moments before someone is having a heart attack."

This is particularly exciting and useful to the paramedics, he said. Because when they arrive on scene to a patient who is doing fairly well, yet might have one of the symptoms of a heart attack such as shortness of breath or a tightness in their chest – the paramedics can take this patient and hook them up to the Audicor and find that either yes, their heart is under stress or no, it's something totally unrelated to the heart.

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When is Audicor used?

Audicor is tested on someone who is comfortable, and isn't showing clear signs of a heart attack, said Lynnwood medic Vince Schweitzer. Maybe the person is just having a shortness of breath and nothing else, medics would hook the person up to the Audicor and test it with the engine off, with the engine running and then en route to the hospital -- so they can compare the results with the different sounds and motion.

Prior to Audicor, medics would just hook the person up to an electrocardiogram machine, which has the ability to tell them whether a person is having or has had a heart attack -- but isn't sensitive enough to let them know one is coming.

Schweitzer added while the Audicor may be a good tool to use on someone who isn't strongly showing signs of a heart attack, it isn't used if a patient is clearly having a heart attack.

"If we know for sure someone is having a heart attack --we don't waste anytime hooking them up to the Audicor -- we treat them and get them to the hospital as quickly as possible," Schweitzer said.

Now citizens served by these departments may be able to stop a heart attack even before one occurs.

Edmonds paramedic Eric Timm said what they use in the field now to check if a heart attack is in process, an EKG machine, doesn't always catch a heart attack in its early stages.

"When people have a lack of blood flow to the heart tissue we can sometimes see that on the EKG – but not all the time," Timm said. "Now, with the Audicor, we're able to have a machine that actually hears the blood flow through the heart. So we're able to use both the EKG and the Audicor, this let us more accurately assess something more obscure that might be going on in the heart."

Timm said this gives the medics another tool to use in the field so they can relay the information to the emergency room where they can be ready to deliver the appropriate care to the patient faster than before.

While Audicor has been out in the field for only about a month, it has already shown its ability to help in the ongoing effort to catch a heart attack before it happens.

"We took this one man to the hospital and he had very subtle symptoms of a possible heart attack," Schweitzer said, "but he was comfortable so we decided to hook him up to the Audicor and it showed that an area of his heart was about to have a heart attack," he said.

Later in the emergency room the same man actually started showing signs of a heart attack and was rushed into the hospital's Cath. Lab where sure enough the heart attack was located exactly where the Audicor said there was trouble 15 minutes earlier.

"They were impressed," Schweitzer said of the doctors and nurses in the Cath. Lab.

The educational information that has already been passed on to physicians and medics has made the effort worth while, said Dr. James Mercer, a physician at Stevens Hospital and the medical program director for the Lynnwood and Edmonds Fire Departments.

"Our goal is to help determine the Audicor device's place and value in the pre-hospital setting and that transition zone from the back of the ambulance into the hospital ER

where physicians can interpret the Audicor tracings," Mercer said.

The study so far has also found problems with the in-field system.

"We have found it really doesn't work while we're en route somewhere or if there is a lot of background noise," Schweitzer said. "But this is why we're doing the study."

Why Lynnwood and Edmonds Medics?

According to Mercer, the reason these medics were chosen to test the new technology is simply because they're good at what they do.

"This is a very talented and motivated group of individuals whose desire to provide top flight medical care to the communities they serve continues to burn deeply within them," Mercer said, adding what was Medic 7 has always been very progressive trying out the latest technology prior to others.

Mercer said Inovise Corporation, Audicor's manufacturer, was looking for a West Coast partner to assist them in getting over some of the technological barriers they faced in developing their Audicor product.

"The paramedic programs of these two cities was ideal for them because we are small, making it easy administratively and physically to work with," he said.

Macke said their hope is that the new technology that is being tested in the two cities for the next six months will help diagnose heart problems faster and more accurately so medics and doctors can deliver faster treatment.

And, Macke said, "The research shows the faster you diagnose sudden heart failure and treat it the faster you get out the hospital."

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