

Saving lives a collaborative effort

By Camen Carvajal

When a dispatch call is received, the Emergency Medical Service (EMS) team at Banff Mineral Springs Hospital know that it is critical to reach their patient as quickly as possible. However, time and again, due to the wilderness and weather conditions of a mountain climate, this can only be achieved through close collaboration with other agencies such as the Fire Department, RCMP, Ski Patrol, and Parks Canada.

Recipients of the 2010 Covenant Health Mission Award for Collaboration, the Banff EMS team is comprised of experienced paramedics and emergency technicians who provide pre-hospital and inter-hospital medical care to individuals in Banff National Park, the Town of Banff and the Village of Lake Louise.

"Particularly in the mountains, it is essential to collaborate with other agencies," said Jane Cusden, Manager, Emergency Services and OR. "In situations where we have to recover a patient from the backcountry, for example, we rely on other teams of experts to look after the safety of the patient and our own safety while we provide medical care, and also to transport the patient by helicopter to a health care facility."

The EMS team responds to approximately 1600 calls a year, ranging from road accidents to sport injuries. Given the vast area they cover, paramedics must have the skills and the stamina to work under extreme weather conditions and to provide patients with medical assistance while traveling long distances. Being based in a rural hospital, the team is in the unique position of not only providing care for patients as they are being transported to the hospital; they must also work closely with nurses in the Emergency Room.

Paramedic Mike Sibbald describes his role as a continuum of care from the moment the patient is picked up to the moment he or she is registered in the Emergency Room at the Banff Mineral Springs Hospital, or transferred to another health care facility in Calgary, if the individual is critically ill.

He noted that working with other agencies is critical to their work. "The number one element in collaborating with other agencies is mutual respect. If you recognize what the other team is trying to achieve and identify the areas where you can help, that guarantees a successful outcome," said Mike.

The EMS team clearly touch the lives of the people they serve. They believe in prevention and collaborate with other organizations to deliver seminars about road safety and alcohol prevention for youth.

"The EMS team is very well respected by the community, they participate in community events and support patients in the community," said Jane. "They have great community spirit!"