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Governor launches LifeFlight trauma training program

By Staff

LEWISTON (Sep 9): Gov. John Baldacci launched Tuesday, Sept. 5, the LifeFlight Foundation's Mobile Human Patient Simulator, the state's first mobile trauma and critical outreach training program.

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The Human Patient Simulator is the lone program of its kind in the nation. Core funding was provided by Maine voters in the 2003 Transportation Bond. With a major implementation grant from the Maine Health Access Foundation and a partnership between Maine EMS, the Maine Department of Public Safety, the LifeFlight Foundation and LifeFlight of Maine, this technology will traverse the state, spending at least a week each year at every one of Maine's hospitals.

"We know that the chain of survival depends on the entire team — from EMS first responders, to hospital emergency staff, to the specialist physicians, physician extenders, and nurses at our specialty hospitals. When we all work together to the same care plan we improve the outcomes of critically ill and injured patients," said Tom Judge, executive director of the LifeFlight Foundation. "The simulator technology paired with a mobile teaching laboratory helps us develop a statewide, high-performance trauma team."

The Human Patient Simulator is housed in a large recreational vehicle reconfigured as a hospital emergency department bay. The heart of the program — three computer driven, high-fidelity mannequins (adult, pediatric and infant) — will allow the LifeFlight Foundation to bring training to hospital personnel and local emergency medical services crews who might otherwise be faced with the barriers of distance or inability to leave the community at regular intervals to train.

"The entire staff was awed by the simulator. They said it was so life-like, it really felt like working with a real patient," said Julie Hilsinger, nurse at Blue Hill Memorial Hospital, the first hospital to receive the simulator on its statewide tour. "You had lab values, X-rays, meds, patient interaction and even body fluids just like in a real scenario. We thought it was one of the best learning tools we have ever seen."

The Human Patient Simulator approach allows providers who might encounter a critically ill or injured patient (especially pediatric) once or twice a year, to encounter a similar "patient" multiple times with focused feedback in a managed stress environment.

The simulator replicates a wide variety of realistic patient illnesses and injuries. These true-to-life scenarios provide medical practitioners with a dynamic "patient" who will improve or deteriorate based on specific procedural inputs. The simulator is so sophisticated and versatile that it blinks, speaks, breathes, and has a heartbeat and a pulse. It also accurately mirrors human responses to CPR, intravenous medication, intubation, ventilation and catheterization.

The simulator is staffed by LifeFlight nurses, paramedics and, as available, physicians. It offers a unique opportunity for rural and urban health-care providers to enhance their team skills in critical care crisis management.

LifeFlight of Maine is a nonprofit, statewide critical care helicopter service. Since 1998, it has safely flown more than 6,000 critically ill and injured patients from more than 325 Maine communities, unorganized townships, and offshore islands.

LifeFlight is Maine's only licensed Scene Response Air Ambulance and is on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. It is the only ambulance service in the state, ground or air, to be fully accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Medical Transport Services.

The LifeFlight Foundation is a separate nonprofit entity organized in 2003 to support the upgrading of aircraft and the educational outreach and injury prevention programs run by LifeFlight of Maine, and also support statewide development of air-medical infrastructure such as hospital helipads, aviation weather reporting and fuel systems.

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