



NEWS RELEASE

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North Alabama implements model trauma system

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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With the implementation of a trauma system Feb. 25, all injured patients in 10 north Alabama counties are now being routed to the most appropriate hospital which has the resources to care for the patient.

Emergency medical technicians at the scene identify injured patients and route them to the closest hospital which has the resources to care for the patient. The EMT contacts the Trauma Communications Center, which knows the current status of all hospitals in North Alabama; so that the patient is routed only to the hospital best able to care for the patient.

"Every second counts when it comes to treating those with traumatic injuries," Gov. Bob Riley said. "This coordinated system will ensure that no time is wasted in getting these patients the urgent medical care they need. Lives will be saved, so this is obviously an important accomplishment."

State Health Officer Dr. Donald Williamson added, "With the addition of North Alabama to the Birmingham region's trauma system, seamless trauma system coverage will be provided to nearly half of the citizens in Alabama, with plans to extend this system statewide in 18 months. Alabama will have the first statewide system of this type in the United States and it will serve as a model for the nation."

Trauma is the leading cause of death for Americans under the age of 45. Almost 80 percent of Alabama's trauma cases are caused by motor vehicle crashes, and Alabama has the fourth highest per capita highway trauma death rate in the U.S. The statewide system is under the leadership of the Alabama Department of Public Health.

Dr. Rony Najjar, a trauma surgeon at Huntsville Hospital, has worked with hospitals, EMS and other entities for more than five years to get the trauma system operational. He said, "This system will help all of us to save lives of trauma patients by assuring that the patient is always transported or transferred to the best hospital with the available resources to treat the patient."

The Alabama Legislature approved the expansion of the statewide trauma system in 2007 with the support and persistence of Rep. Ron Johnson, a Republican of Sylacauga and State Sen. Parker Griffith, a Democrat of Madison.

Griffith, who is a retired physician, cosponsored the bill. "The first hour, which is known as the golden hour, is the most critical time for a patient who has been involved in an accident and has suffered from life threatening injuries. It is vital to administer an effective and efficient system so that facilities that provide specialized care in trauma are made available to every Alabamian when they are needed most," Griffith said.

"Every Alabamian deserves access to the best trauma system we can give them to serve them and their loved ones. This new system will save lives and provide hospitals with the necessary resources to administer the most adequate and effective critical care. I am excited about the implementation of this system. Time is vital in emergencies and this system will ensure that residents receive the most appropriate care during their greatest need," Griffith concluded.

State Sen. Tom Butler, also a Democrat from Madison, who has been a strong advocate for emergency medical service improvements, applauded the governor, the health department, and all the hospitals in making this trauma system happen.

Butler said this trauma system makes the "golden hour" to save a life in a trauma event a reality for North Alabama. "It will save lives," he said.

The Regional Trauma System uses the Trauma Communication Center, which electronically monitors the status of each trauma hospital to ensure people in emergency situations are transported to the facility that can best handle their condition. Hospital participation in the program is voluntary.

"Because trauma patients' survival rates improve dramatically when they are evaluated, treated and transported to the correct hospital within the first hour after an accident, this system will save lives," said Dr. Najjar.

Hospitals participating in the trauma system and their trauma levels are as follows:

Huntsville Hospital – Level 1; Decatur General Hospital – Level 2; Athens-Limestone Hospital— Level 3; Crestwood Medical Center – Level 3; Cullman Regional Medical Center – Level 3; Eliza Coffee Memorial Hospital – Level 3; Marshall Medical Center North – Level 3; Marshall Medical Center South— Level 3; Parkway Medical Center – Level 3; Russellville Hospital – Level 3.

The North Alabama Trauma System region consists of the following counties: Colbert, Cullman, Franklin, Jackson, Lawrence, Lauderdale, Limestone, Madison, Marshall and Morgan. The Birmingham Regional Emergency Medical Service System serves Blount, Chilton, Jefferson, Shelby, St. Clair, Walker and Winston counties in north central Alabama.