



Trauma Care Is Critical for All

By Dr. Julie Dunn

Missy Milhorne and her husband believe in trauma centers. You can ask them because they are trauma survivors who received treatment at the Johnson City Medical Center trauma center.

As a trauma surgeon, it is easy for me to understand how important a trauma center is to a community. However, to most folks, it is probably a lot less clear what a trauma center is and does. Here are some key facts:

A trauma center is different from an emergency room. A Level I trauma center (like we have here in Johnson City) requires a wider array of specific resources – both personnel and equipment – that must be available around the clock. Specialized physicians and nurses, surgeons, operating rooms and state-of-the-art equipment on constant standby are a few of the operating costs that trauma centers face every day.

The majority of trauma cases in Tennessee are motor vehicle crashes. JCMC admitted more than 1,500 trauma patients in 2006. Most of these patients had been involved in motor vehicle crashes. A severe automobile crash could require as many as six specialized surgeons.

The first hour after a traumatic injury is the most critical to survival. This is known as the “golden hour.”

Missy Milhorne was nearly killed by a drunk driver eight years ago. She had to be cut out of her seat by emergency personnel. She suffered extensive internal injuries and many fractured bones. The crash happened within minutes of the hospital, and the prompt response by local EMS in getting her out of the car and to the trauma center probably saved her life. Still, Missy lost her right foot because of her severe injuries.

Missy’s husband, who was in the car with her, was more fortunate. His most serious injury was a shattered hip.

Trauma is most prevalent among young men. Thirty-nine percent of the admissions in 2005 were under age 35, and 59 percent were male. Our busiest times are weekend evenings.

Trauma centers are expensive to operate. It costs about \$14 million a year just for a hospital to keep a trauma center open.

Trauma centers and the trauma center system are vital to the health and well-being of Tennesseans. In 2005, more than 18,000 people were admitted into a Tennessee trauma center. Today, no Tennessean is more than 100 air miles from a Level I trauma center. However, without a dedicated funding stream, fewer hospitals will have the necessary resources to fund a trauma center.

We need a dedicated funding mechanism to ensure the Tennessee trauma network remains fiscally sound. The Tennessee Trauma Alliance is working with the legislature and the Bredesen administration to find a dedicated funding stream for the trauma network. We are optimistic that some stable and re-occurring funding can be found.

“If you’ve been through it and lived through it,” says Missy Milhorne, “you know how important that trauma center is. If you haven’t, you just don’t know.”

Dr. Julie Dunn is head of the trauma center at JCMC and chair of the state Trauma Care Advisory Council. For more information about trauma centers, go to www.tntrauma.org.