



## **Trauma Care Is Critical for All**

By: Dr. Corydon Siffring  
And Dr. Mark Woodard

Wellmont Health System is unique among Tennessee's trauma network facilities, but we share a common funding issue that should be a concern to all.

Tennessee's trauma network consists of six Level I, one Level II and two Level III trauma centers positioned across the state. Wellmont operates two of those centers – the Level I Holston Valley Medical Center and the Level II Bristol Regional Medical Center. We are, in fact, the only Tennessee healthcare system that operates two trauma centers.

Wellmont is the exclusive medical care provider for Bristol Motor Speedway and provides full trauma support during two NASCAR races in Bristol each year. More than 160,000 people attend each race.

It costs about \$14 million a year just to keep a Level I trauma center "ready" to accept patients. That may be a bargain when you think about what it takes to operate a trauma center.

First, think about the kinds of trauma cases seen in a trauma center. Most are the result of motor vehicle crashes. Most of the victims are male. More than half are young – under 50. Trauma centers are busy all the time but are often busiest on weekend evenings.

In 2005, Holston Valley and Bristol Regional admitted more than 1,700 trauma patients. The first hour after a trauma injury is the most critical to the patient's future. In fact, it is known in medical circles as the "golden hour."

The victim of a serious motor vehicle crash, for example, could need up to six specialized surgeons. And those experts would need to be available at a moment's notice.

That means our trauma centers must have specialized personnel and equipment available around the clock – 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

In addition to the readiness costs, there is the issue of uncompensated care. In 2005, the total uncompensated trauma costs for Tennessee Level I trauma centers was \$37.6

million, which includes uncompensated costs from the uninsured and uncompensated TennCare care costs.

Wellmont is part of the Tennessee Trauma Alliance, and we are working with state officials to identify a dedicated funding source for our trauma network. Keeping our trauma network strong should be important to everyone in our region.

There are enough things to worry about when you get into your automobile on a Friday evening without the additional worry of whether or not a trauma center will be available if you need it.

*Dr. Corydon Siffring is a board-certified critical-care surgeon and medical director of Holston Valley Medical Center's trauma center. Dr. Mark Woodard is a board-certified emergency medicine physician and medical director of Bristol Regional Medical Center's emergency department. More information about Tennessee's trauma network can be found at [www.tntrauma.org](http://www.tntrauma.org).*