



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Decline in Stroke and Heart Attack Activations Across Louisiana Creates Concern

Baton Rouge, LA – The Louisiana Emergency Response Network (LERN) is the agency of state government with the responsibility of developing and maintaining a statewide system of care coordination for patients suddenly stricken by serious traumatic injury or time-sensitive illness (such as heart attack and stroke). LERN leaders have peer survey evidence of a decline of hospital activations for Stroke and STEMI patients that coincides with the onset of the COVID-19 crisis in Louisiana. LERN’s leaders are concerned that the decline in Stroke and STEMI activations is the result of understandable but ill-advised reluctance to seek immediate care due to worries and fears created by the COVID-19 pandemic rather than fewer of these events occurring.

“It is important that people experiencing Stroke or STEMI symptoms seek medical care immediately. Stroke and STEMI are time-sensitive illnesses that create irreparable damage, and often death, when patients hesitate to seek the care they need”, says Paige Hargrove, LERN Executive Director.

Christopher White, M.D. is Professor and Chair of Medicine and Cardiology at Ochsner Medical Center and serves as LERN’s STEMI System medical director. Dr. White states “In Louisiana, and across the country, we are seeing a dramatic decline in patients with heart attacks coming to the hospital.” The advice to Louisiana citizens is straightforward says Dr. White “If you are experiencing significant symptoms of increasing chest pain or shortness of breath this may indicate you are at risk for a heart attack, which is much more life-threatening than the risk of COVID-19 exposure. Please contact your physician for instructions or come to the Emergency Department for care. It could save your life.”

LERN’s Stroke System medical director is Sheryl Martin-Schild, M.D. who also serves as the Medical Director of Neurology & Stroke for Touro Infirmary and New Orleans East Hospital in New Orleans. Dr. Martin-Schild says “We have treatments for stroke that reduce the chance of disability and dependency – but these treatments are time-sensitive and become less effective with each minute of delay.” Stroke symptoms include sudden loss of balance and/or eyesight, facial weakness or numbness, arm/leg weakness or numbness, clumsiness, speech disturbance, or terrible headache. Dr. Martin-Schild’s advice is direct, “Do not compromise your forever function due to fears of being in the hospital. Our emergency services are prepared to respond to your call and our hospitals are prepared to rapidly provide the care you need. Every minute matters.”

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The Louisiana Emergency Response Network (LERN) is an agency of state government created by the Louisiana Legislature in 2004 charged with the responsibility of developing and maintaining a statewide system of care coordination for patients suddenly stricken by serious traumatic injury or time-sensitive illness (such as heart attack and stroke). It is a system also designated to serve as a vital healthcare resource in the face of larger scale emergencies and natural disasters.

Building Louisiana's Statewide STEMI Care System: ST-segment myocardial infarction (STEMI) is the deadliest form of a heart attack that results from the complete closure of a major coronary artery. LERN's ongoing development of Louisiana's statewide STEMI care system is based upon best practice guidelines as established by the American Heart Association's Mission Lifeline and successful systems across the country. Addressing the challenge of timely patient access to existing reperfusion (reopening of the artery) therapies is central to Louisiana's STEMI care system.

Building Louisiana's Statewide Stroke Care System: LERN's ongoing development of Louisiana's statewide stroke care system is guided by the evidence-based "hub and spoke" model that facilitates widespread patient access to lifesaving care and treatment with tissue plasminogen activator (tPA), the only FDA approved medication for treatment of an occlusive stroke within the first few hours. Louisiana's "hub and spoke" model includes Comprehensive Stroke Center and Primary Stroke Center hubs, and spoke hospitals connected by telemedicine.