

Better diagnosis in the field for heart patients



SLT
firefighter
Doug Bailey
straps a heart
monitor onto
colleague
Brennen Davis.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Wires are strapped to Brennen Davis's chest. A South Lake Tahoe Fire Department paramedic reads the squiggly line on the monitor to analyze what is going on with the patient's heart.

Brennen is a healthy 24-year-old "no heart problems. He's the model for the day to demonstrate the latest piece of equipment he and other firefighter-paramedics at SLT and Lake Valley fire departments are using in the field.

The previous heart monitor didn't have a diagnostic capability. This 12-lead device is designed to tell first responders if the patient needs to go to a cardiac hospital or not.

The various leads give different views of the heart.

Capt. Chris Hertel said with the old equipment it was not possible to always definitively tell if someone was having a heart attack.

The information gathered allows paramedics to relay to emergency room personnel what to expect when the ambulance arrives.

"I like to leave it on during transport because there may be a change," explained firefighter-paramedic Doug Bailey.

Tahoe-Douglas Fire Protection District has been using the monitor for about 18 months. With Carson-Tahoe Hospital in Carson City having the closest cath lab, Tahoe-Douglas drives patients there.

El Dorado County is working with Barton Memorial Hospital so starting next year patients would go right to Carson-Tahoe if need be. Most likely the person would be driven to Lake Tahoe Airport and airlifted by CalSTAR.

Five of the devices were bought for South Tahoe and Lake Valley at a cost of \$112,000.

Additional training was required by the staff to use the monitor. However, these devices are now part of regular schoolwork to become a paramedic.