

# STAT

## TRAINING RURAL TRAUMA TEAMS —

CALS training provides front-line skills that save lives.

The lack of specialists and equipment is a huge challenge in rural America. A significant portion of the U.S. population — 38.4 million people — don't have access to trauma care within less than an hour's drive.<sup>1</sup> So rural hospitals have to step in to handle trauma and other critical injuries and illnesses. But sending rural staff to train in distant cities is a drain on already overstretched hospital budgets.

That's where the Comprehensive Advanced Life Support (CALS) program comes in. CALS was designed to help rural hospital providers in resource-constrained environments meet the challenges of emergency medicine. Instead of rural hospital staff traveling to larger cities, CALS instructors go to them. CALS staff train teams onsite at rural hospitals, not only teaching life-saving stabilization protocols and team skills, but also offering rural staff the crucial opportunity to practice these new skills.

"People may have learned these skills in medical school, but you don't get to practice them on a regular basis," says Laurie Drill-Mellum, MD, MPH and chief medical officer at Constellation. "Then, all of a sudden, with one emergency patient you might have to do an airway, do a cut-down to gain vascular access, and on another patient you might have to deliver a baby with a shoulder dystocia and then intubate a newborn. CALS training and skills lab gives you the chance to learn and actually practice these critical skills."

The CALS program is different from other trainings because it goes beyond specialized courses in emergency care. Their Universal Protocol helps providers identify and treat the full range of possible illness or injury, including trauma, OB, neonatal, cardiac, pediatric and more. The key is educating health care providers to anticipate, recognize and treat life-threatening emergencies.

"Trauma is important, but a lot of other critical medical conditions are time-sensitive, and it's important to know how to deal with those, too," says Kari Lappe, RN and executive director of CALS.

Equipment can be critical to performing life-saving procedures, and often during training, teams will realize what key equipment they might need to help them do their best work. "If it's an airway problem, you not only have to recognize it, but you have to have the equipment available, and you need to know how to use that equipment in order to get the best outcome for the patient," says Lappe.

Data on successful outcomes is just beginning to come in. A small critical access hospital in Granite Falls, Minn., observed

### FOUR ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS

Emergency Skills and Knowledge

Effective Provider Teams

Patient-Focused Care and Systems

Appropriate Equipment

The CALS curriculum is based on four key elements that drive success when treating patients in an emergent setting.

Source: CALS

increased efficiency in handling time-sensitive patient disorders, and a 60 percent reduction in door-to-door transfer times — from 133 minutes prior to training, to 48 minutes on average — two years after CALS training.<sup>1</sup>

Since starting in the Midwest in 1996, CALS has taught more than 6,800 medical professionals, and has begun global outreach, adapting CALS for developing countries including Haiti and Kenya. As the preferred emergency training provider for U.S. Embassies, CALS has trained more than 1,600 medical personnel around the globe.

To continue their outreach, CALS is always on the lookout for experienced rural providers who want to become instructors. "It's a very rewarding experience to go out to these rural communities, to work with their teams and see how they improve during the class. It's amazing what many of these hospitals can do even with limited resources," says Lappe.

#### Reference

1. Carter, D., Lappe, K., & Schoenfelt, S. (2011, May). Standardized comprehensive education for rural emergency care providers: The role of the CALS rural emergency medical education program. *Certification & EM Workforce Section Newsletter*.

#### Resource

Comprehensive Advanced Life Support. [www.calsprogram.org](http://www.calsprogram.org)

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