New national training programme takes enhanced A&E skills out to patients

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This is thanks to a partnership between Cambridge University Hospitals (CUH) and medical charity Magpas Helimedix.

Pre-hospital emergency medicine (PHEM) develops and enhances the skills of A&E doctors based at Addenbrooke’s and across the country, and those of paramedics experienced in working in challenging environmental and hazardous conditions.

Despite a long history of physician-based pre-hospital care in the UK, especially in the East of England, doctors have been providing PHEM mostly on a voluntary and ad hoc basis, with a variable level of care.

CUH, in partnership with Magpas and the Edinburgh-based Faculty of Pre-hospital Care, has now piloted specialist training programmes.

The PHEM training model focuses on caring for seriously ill or injured patients in urban, rural, or remote settings before they reach hospital, and during emergency transfer to hospital or between hospitals, and in support of the NHS ambulance services and air ambulance charities.

Just like a doctor can become a consultant in gastroenterology or orthopaedic surgery, doctors who are consultants in a specialty that focuses on very unwell patients will also be able to specialise in pre-hospital emergency medicine and provide out-of-hospital support for seriously sick patients.

Pre-hospital emergency medicine is the first new medical sub-specialty to be approved by the General Medical Council in several years.
The charity funded training is provided by Magpas, supported by CUH emergency department (ED) consultants. Nick Foster, one of the CUH ED doctors, was the first national trainee and started in post in the East of England in August 2012. He will finish his training in July this year. There is now a national recruitment into this sub speciality with 14 places available from August 2014.

The PHEM training course is the brainchild of Dr Roderick Mackenzie, consultant in emergency medicine, CUH Major Trauma Centre director, and Dr Simon Lewis, CUH ED consultant and East of England Regional Training Programme Director. Dr Robert Major, CUH ED consultant, is chair of the department of pre-hospital and retrieval medicine. All three are also Magpas doctors.

Dr Roderick Mackenzie said:

“I don’t define my specialty by bricks and mortar, by the boundaries of the emergency department. Emergency care is a process, not a place. It’s really important to me to understand and be able to influence what happens to people before they get to the emergency department. I can’t necessarily do everything I could do for them if they arrive in a poor condition or they arrive without having had optimal care in the pre hospital phase.

“Pre-hospital emergency medicine is a natural extension of emergency medicine. Instead of waiting for people to come we reach out and we either go to them to help them get to us or we support the services that go to them.

“Addenbrooke’s has really grasped that principle and understood that if we can optimise the care of patients before they get to us then actually they do better here and they spend less time in hospital. There is a powerful clinical and economic argument for providing optimal care from the moment someone is injured, rather just waiting until they arrive at a particular hospital.

“CUH has a long historical association with pre-hospital services around the region, and, with Magpas, has developed the new department of pre-hospital emergency medicine. And we have formed really close working relationships with the charity sector to provide the training, the training infrastructure, the consultant level supervision and practice to support the service.”

CUH continues to work closely with Magpas and other pre-hospital charities to further develop specialist training programmes and innovative ways of providing high quality pre-hospital care.