



Dave Griffith demonstrates the phone which connects the van with the hospital. This allows direct communication with the hospital and can be vital in getting follow-up directions to the scene of an accident.



Dave Griffith takes the wheel of the mobile unit. The van is specially designed to take the hard driving required. Maintenance is regular and complete.

Real life 'Emergency' Unit operating in Lancaster area

By SALLY BAIR
Feature Writer

The moment of crisis is here. Suddenly the farm accident which could only happen to someone else has happened to your family. What should you do? If you have the number 393-1119 in your head and are automatically reaching for the phone and dialing, the chances are good that you will save a life.

The above phone number will connect you with the mobile intensive care unit of Saint Joseph's Hospital in Lancaster, and within 45 seconds of your call it will be on its way to offer life-saving assistance.

And, while the mobile unit is speeding on its way to the scene, a call from the hospital will dispatch local police and a local ambulance as well, to provide a dual response to your call for help.

According to medic Dave Griffith, who is assigned to the mobile unit, the unit is designed to "provide basic life support in life-threatening situations. It is really an emergency room on wheels."

The unit moves out with two medics, a registered nurse, and a licensed practical nurse, all of whom are specially trained to take over the mobile life support system and provide any emergency treatment required.

If this all sounds a little like the "Emergency!" television program, it is, but with a very notable exception. In St. Joseph's mobile unit, medical personnel are trained and under standing orders to carry out specific medication without communicating directly with the hospital. They are trained to recognize and treat symptoms and provide medical attention immediately.

Since the unit carries all the necessary life support equipment, their sole purpose is to save lives, and they can stay with a patient until his condition is stabilized, and at that point the move to a hospital can be made.

The unit itself is just four years old, but has already

become a well-known and respected institution around the county. The unit averages about five calls a day, but it has had as many as nine calls in one 12-hour shift. In one 12 month period, the unit responded to 1746 calls. It carries supplies to handle up to 50 people in a disaster.

According to Griffith, the unit responds to any life-threatening, critical situation, including such things as electrical shock, emergency childbirth, stroke, drowning, automobile and industrial accidents, knife and gunshot wounds and others. They can provide any emergency room procedure except to perform surgery or give blood.

Homestead Notes

With the yearly cost of operating the unit at \$155,000, it is not hard to imagine that it is the most pampered vehicle in Lancaster County. Regular maintenance is carried out every 2000 miles, and the unit is equipped with a special "umbilical package" which keeps the interior of the van and the engine warm so there are quick starts in even the coldest weather.

The medics are responsible for routine maintenance of the unit, and supplies and equipment is checked with each 12-hour shift. Supplies are replaced after each call. Medics also keep records of any equipment which may need to be replaced. Basically, the unit is always in tip-top shape.

While the unit is designed to carry up to four victims,

they prefer to transport no more than two. Since they regularly dispatch local ambulances to the scene outside the city, these vehicles are often used to transport patients once their condition is stabilized. Griffith explained further that except in cases of severe trauma the patient is given a choice of hospitals and will be transported to his chosen hospital. In severe trauma cases the patient will be taken to the nearest hospital.

Despite the obviously high cost of maintaining this equipment, there is no charge for calls. Griffith explained that the hospital charges for any medication given, as required by federal law. It is estimated that an average call costs the unit \$125.

The unit is maintained primarily by donations, and this year the Farm Women Societies of Lancaster County have selected it as their county project. At their county convention on November 6, they will present a check for slightly over \$2000 to Dave Griffith to help with the continuing cost of the equipment. The difference between contributions and operating costs is made up by the hospital.

Currently there are eight medics and 17 nurses who are qualified and who share equally the responsibilities of the 12 hour shifts working on the mobile unit. Griffith explained that the nurses are assigned to the Intensive Care Unit regularly and the medics to the emergency room, so they are on the job for their full shift, whether or not a call comes for the mobile unit.

Interestingly, there is a list of 100-150 people who have expressed interest in training to become eligible to work with the mobile unit. The reason, Griffith said, lies in the fact that people working in the volunteer ambulance field would like to become the best, and would like to get into the professional atmosphere of the unit. He said, "It's a unique area. We care for critically ill patients, and there is a great versatility of

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Medic Dave Griffith looks into the "trauma kit" which contains all the necessary equipment to deal with severe trauma in an medical emergency.



This is St. Joseph's Hospital's Intensive Care Unit which could save your life.