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RX: MEDICAL NEWS

5 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT...

RAPID RESPONSE TEAMS

1 Critical care: A rapid response team is a group of clinicians who administer critical care. The RRT at Palmetto General Hospital in Hialeah includes a physician, critical care nurse, respiratory therapist and the primary care nurse, says Jacqueline Gonzalez, a nurse practitioner. "The most important person on the team is the primary nurse," Gonzalez says. "She knows the patient's history."

2 On the double: The RRT is at a patient's bedside within minutes to assess the patient, order tests and administer treatment, says Diane Berman, clinical specialist for respiratory care at North Shore Medical Center in Miami.

3 Patient safety: The idea is to keep the patient safe, Berman says. "I tell nurses, 'If the team comes and nothing is wrong, that's fine,' so they won't be intimidated to call the team." At North Shore it's called RAT — rapid assessment team — to avoid confusion with the other RRT, registered respiratory therapist. At some hospitals it's called the medical emergency team.



4 Sparks, fires: Breathing problems and chest pains — symptoms of cardiac or respiratory arrest — are common reasons for calling the RRT, Gonzalez and Berman say. When such symptoms are treated early, death can be prevented. The Institute for Healthcare Improvement, whose purpose is to keep patients safe in hospitals, says the goal of the RRT is to respond to a "spark" (patient complaints, symptoms) before it becomes a "forest fire" (cardiac or respiratory arrest).

5 JAMA study: In a study published last November in the Journal of the American Medical Association, the implementation of an RRT was associated with a significant reduction in hospital-wide mortality rate and code rate outside of a pediatric ICU setting in a 264-bed academic children's hospital.

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