



BACK TO THE FUTURE

# MOBILE MEDICINE

House calls free up ERs for true emergencies

BY JUDITH KANNE

UNNECESSARY EMERGENCY room visits place a financial and service burden on hospitals, especially “safety net” facilities that serve large numbers of uninsured patients. A few Georgia institutions are reducing their losses by responding to some 911 calls with teams of healthcare professionals who can treat patients in the field.

This method, called “mobile integrated healthcare,” keeps “frequent flyers” and “over-abusers” out of the emergency department. At Grady Health System, the approach is projected to free up 8,400 hours of annual bed space and save nearly \$444,000.

GRADY SAVINGS

8,400

HOURS OF ANNUAL BED SPACE FREED UP

\$444K

SAVED

1,200

CALLS PER YEAR HANDLED BY MOBILE PROGRAM

ChoiceCare Ambulance in Central Georgia sends out paramedics, with home visits costing as little as \$50; Hall County sends nurse practitioners with its EMS pros. David Kimbrell, the county’s director of emergency management, says, “Our MIH responders can take care of non-life-threatening problems, including writing prescriptions and minor procedures.”

Hall County responders typically go to homes in an SUV or sedan, sans sirens. They are equipped with a mini lab to perform tests and certain treatments. “We are able to bill for less than \$500,” says Kimbrell. In contrast, the fee just to transport a patient to the hospital starts at \$775 in that area.

Grady’s trial three-week program is now in its second year. Initially focused on mental health, the Grady Upstream Crisis Intervention program has since expanded its reach and now handles more than 1,200 calls a year.



## 3-D PRINTING KNEE IMPLANTS

➔ THE CHIEF OF sports medicine at Gwinnett Medical Center, Dr. Gary Levengood, was among the first U.S. surgeons to perform total knee replacements using 3-D printing technology. To date, he has completed more than 500 partial and total customized procedures. We asked him about this new technology.

**What is the benefit of this procedure?**

Most knee implants are off the shelf and come in only a limited range of sizes. By using custom implants, I don’t have to make compromises.

**How does it work?**

Instead of ink, a special liquid is converted into a plastic modeling material. This printer can then create a solid form by slowly adding layer after layer until a three-dimensional structure results. The form is based on CT scans, multiple x-rays, or MRI images of a patient’s own anatomy, and is used to create a mold for a metal implant.

**What about cost?**

The cost to patients is the same.

**Can this procedure be used for other bones?**

Currently only knee implants are available. However, the manufacturer hopes to develop replacements for hips and other joints. —J.K.

## X-RAY VISION

Most patients never meet the doctors who read their x-rays, CT scans, or MRIs, yet radiologists often make critical diagnoses that affect patients’ treatment. To help patients make sense of their results, Dr. Rourke Stay, a board-certified radiologist, founded Lightbulb Radiology, a Columbus-based service that provides online second opinions via GoToMeeting. A personal consult costs \$299. [lightbulbradiology.com](http://lightbulbradiology.com) —J.K.