Background Regarding South Side Trauma Centers

Research and recent media reports have shown that transport times from the South Side to the nearest adult trauma center have had no impact on medical outcomes. Here are some other critical points and background on reasons the University of Chicago Medical Center does not have a Level 1 adult trauma center:

- The University of Chicago Medical Center has not had a Level 1 adult trauma center for more than two decades. In 1988, when the hospital closed its trauma center, Michael Reese hospital was still open and running a Level 1 Trauma Center. The Medical Center’s decision to close its trauma center came after finding that the trauma center overwhelmed other surgical facilities and delayed life-saving procedures for other patients. The decision was made to concentrate resources in the clinical specialties where the Medical Center can play the greatest role, such as operating a Level 1 trauma center for children, the only burn unit on the South Side, and a neonatal intensive care unit, and the only hospital-run emergency helicopter response service in the Chicago region.
- Both peer-reviewed research and recent media accounts have shown that a delay in transport from the South Side to a trauma center has had no impact on patient outcomes. Both WBEZ and the Medical Center separately analyzed the last three years of transport times in Cook County. This includes more than 22,500 trauma responses from 2008 to 2010. The median transport time on the North Side is 11 minutes and 15 minutes on the South Side. This four-minute difference is medically insignificant, according to national studies.
- Cook County is served by nine Level 1 trauma centers. Illinois has the best access to trauma care of any Midwestern state, and Chicago has the best access in Illinois. No one in Cook County is more than 32 minutes from a trauma center.
- It’s important to recognize that gunshot trauma injuries are just one of many health disparities on the South Side. Through the research and community clinical care efforts of the Medical Center, members of our faculty and the Urban Health Initiative, the Medical Center is addressing many of the health disparities in our surrounding neighborhoods, such as diabetes, obesity, breast cancer, HIV infection rates and basic lack of access to medicine. UCMC spends more than $200 million every year on charity care, uncompensated care, and unreimbursed funding of education and research. Additionally, community health centers all over the South Side are staffed with physicians, residents and students from the Medical Center.
- The Medical Center is looking at ways it can help decrease violence in the community. The hospital’s emergency room currently treats the second highest number of sexual assault and domestic violence victims in the city and is partnering with the state to train its nurses to become certified Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners.

For more on the trauma center issue, please visit uchospitals.edu/news/trauma.