

## Did EMS delay cause man's death?

Jul 15, 2009 04:30 AM

[Comments on this story](#) (35)

Donovan Vincent

Dale Anne Freed

STAFF REPORTERS

A claim that paramedics refused to enter a downtown condo building to help a dying man because of concerns for their "health and safety" has been refuted by the good Samaritan who tried to save him.

"It was not a dangerous situation. It's a very safe building, extremely safe," said Manuel Rodriguez, who administered CPR to the man in a main floor hallway while paramedics waited outside for police.

"If it were dangerous, I wouldn't have risked my life and involved more people," the 32-year-old added last night.

At a news conference yesterday, Bruce Farr, head of the city's Emergency Medical Services, responded to witnesses who said an ambulance didn't come to the aid of Jim Hearst for at least 30 minutes, despite three, perhaps four, 911 calls.

"When the call came in, the crew received information that raised their concerns for their own health and safety," Farr said about the 20-minute delay on June 25, when Hearst fell and hit his head either before or after a heart attack.

The delay has sparked concerns that reduced staffing of EMS during the city workers' strike played a part, but Farr insisted the response time was not related to the labour disruption. While 25 per cent of paramedics are off the job because of the strike, EMS workers are designated essential workers by law.

Farr said paramedics arrived outside Hearst's apartment near Yonge and Wellesley within accepted response times – in this case nine minutes.

But the ambulance workers stayed outside the building for an "undetermined" amount of time to await the arrival of police, Farr said.

The initial call to 911 that night – witnesses pegged it as being made just after 11 p.m. – described a situation that was not life-threatening: the report of a man bleeding from his head, with no mention of heart problems, Farr told reporters.

But once the paramedics received an update with information indicating that Hearst wasn't breathing, they "put aside their own health and safety concerns and acted immediately on that information and went in to the scene," the EMS head said.

Farr would not indicate what those concerns were, except to say that paramedics who have reason to believe an assault is in progress or there is a person with a weapon can choose to wait for police.

Garrett Flynn, 36, Rodriguez's roommate, was also on the scene.

"That was the critical period, really," Flynn said of the ambulance delay. "Had they been 10 to 15 minutes



STUART NIMMO FILE PHOTO

*Bruce Farr, EMS chief*

earlier, possibly they could have saved Jim."

Rodriguez said he did everything he could to save the man's life.

"We moved him to a recovery position," he said. "I kept his head in my hands, 'You're fine. Somebody is coming to help.'"

"I couldn't believe it happened," Rodriguez added. "I couldn't do any more. I just did my best."

Farr said specifics about the night Hearst died – such as the nature of the health and safety issues, the exact time between the initial 911 call and when paramedics finally got to Hearst – are part of an internal investigation.

He said tapes of the 911 calls might be released to the public in the future, but that decision would wait until the EMS probe is completed.

"I want to assure Torontonians that in a medical emergency, they can be confident in dialling 911. Toronto EMS will respond and provide emergency medical service to those in need," Farr said.

He added that he believes that EMS's "very strict protocols" were followed in this case.

*With files from Paul Moloney*