



NEW JERSEY'S HOSPITAL SERVICE CORPORATION

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*A Non-Profit Cooperative to Improve Health Care and Reduce Members' Costs*

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## **When Something Is Better Than Nothing: The Challenges of Offering a Free Child Passenger Safety Program When Demand Exceeds Funding**

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### Background:

Motor vehicle crashes are the number one cause of death of children over the age of six months in the United States. The proper use of child car seats is one of the simplest and most effective methods available for protecting lives. The Monmouth-Ocean Hospital Service Corporation (MONOC) is a non-profit hospital cooperative and the largest provider of Emergency Medical Services and medical transportation in New Jersey. In 2004 a Child Passenger Safety program was developed to offer free child passenger safety seat inspections, car seat installations, and education to the public. Because MONOC was not eligible to receive federal grant funding from the New Jersey Division of Highway Traffic Safety, all funding for the program was either from MONOC's general fund or from an occasional corporate donation.

### Objective:

To identify a way to continue to operate a free Child Passenger Safety program that has quickly grown in size by over 366% in just two years and has exceeded the available funds for the program.

### Methods:

A major paradigm shift from offering "open check points" for Child Passenger Safety inspections was made to "inspection by appointment". In theory, this method should allow for more efficient scheduling of Child Passenger Safety Technicians with less down time between inspections. While this method was designed to encourage participants to make an appointment for a set time, never will a passer by who sees a roadside Child Passenger Safety checkpoint and wants an inspection ever be turned away.

### Results:

As a result of the change over from open Child Passenger Safety check points to inspection by appointment, we have observed a significant decrease in wait times and a much higher utilization rate of the Child Passenger Safety Technicians. As a result of these cost savings, additional inspection by appointment check points were able to be offered. An unexpected benefit was higher satisfaction levels among the Technicians because they felt as though they were less "rushed" doing the inspections and now had the ability to concentrate on their true goal of "education not just installation."

### Conclusions:

Although the overall number of child passenger safety seat inspections was reduced by more than half from 2006 to 2007, we were able to continue to offer this free service to the public by utilizing a more efficient approach. As a result of persistent lobbying and by demonstrating our ability to run an efficient and cost effective program, the NJ Division of Highway Traffic Safety is considering allowing non-profit organizations like MONOC the ability to receive federal grant funding that was otherwise mainly reserved in the past for law enforcement agencies. While most well designed public health programs provide profound benefits to their target audiences, little benefit can be realized if the program is not sustainable. In today's world of limited financial resources, a determination must be made how to get the greatest return on your investment. Sometimes the answer is only found when common practices are challenged and new solutions are sought.