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

*Selected for Presentation at the 2011 Society for Academic Emergency Medicine's
Western Regional Meeting in Keystone, CO*

Communications Centers Operated By Agencies With ALS Services Are More Accurate In Determining The Need For ALS Than Non Affiliated Centers

December 2010

Background:

New Jersey has a 2 tiered EMS system with distinct Basic Life Support (BLS) and Advanced Life Support (ALS) units located throughout the state. Additionally, NJ processes 911 calls using two different methods dependant on the geographic region. In some areas communication centers that dispatch ALS units function as the secondary Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) providing the Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD) functions of caller interrogation and dispatching of appropriate resources. In other regions ALS calls are received from a regional PSAP, and the ALS dispatch agency functions strictly as a Public Safety Dispatch Point (PSDP) assigning the call to the closest paramedic unit. In this case, the ALS dispatch agency has no direct communication with the person calling for the ambulance. The PSAP will also arrange for a BLS ambulance to be dispatched.

Objectives:

Communications Centers operated by agencies with ALS services are more accurate in determining the need for ALS than non affiliated Centers.

Methods:

A retrospective review of 12961 calls was conducted to cover a fourteen month period in two urban settings (I and P/C) where the study agency provides ALS services. The demographics of the two regions are very similar for population size and density, median income, median age. All requests for ALS services for the two study areas were included for review regardless of their mode of entry into the 911 system.

Results:

Of 12961 total calls dispatched to an ALS unit, 8494 calls resulted in an outcome of canceled (66%). In the geographic area (I) where this agency provides primary 911 call processing (PSAP) an ALS unit was dispatched 4484 times and canceled 2634 (59%). In the geographic area (P/C) where the 911 call is processed by another PSAP ALS unit was dispatched 8477 times and canceled 5860 times (69%). In the second study area (P/C) the break down of dispatch to cancellation rate is (P) 4148/3004 (73%) and (C) 4329/2856 (66%).

Conclusion:

Communications Centers operated by agencies with ALS services are more accurate in determining the need for ALS than non affiliated Centers. In order to better allocate scarce resources, ALS call screening and dispatching should be completed by the agency that operates these units. This will ensure strict adherence to EMD protocols while being monitored by a rigorous quality improvement program.