

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY  
ADMINISTRATION

# COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

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## HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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December 29, 1998

AGENDA: January 12, 1999

### BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

County of Santa Cruz  
701 Ocean Street  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

RE: Report back Concerning Fire Service Integration into the EMS System

Dear Board Members:

On December 16, 1997, your Board approved a five-year agreement with American Medical Response (AMR) for the provision of County-wide ambulance services. As part of your actions on the contract, HSA was directed to report on progress made in integrating fire services into the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) system.

For many years, the fire services have been an essential element of the EMS system. Historically, fire-based Basic Life Support (BLS) personnel are dispatched by the communication center simultaneously with the ambulance-based Advanced Life Support (ALS) providers (paramedics). Generally, the fire-based first responder personnel arrive on scene before the ALS personnel, and begin to secure the scene, provide basic airway and circulatory support, and administer first aid. The ALS personnel typically assumes care of the individual upon their arrival, and apply ALS skills appropriate to the situation prior to transport.

The direction for additional integration was at the request of HSA and the County's fire services providers, and reflects the interest of some local fire services in becoming providers of Advanced Life Support (ALS) services, and integrating those services with/into the County's existing Emergency Medical Services system. It is believed that providing engine-based ALS services may allow a paramedic-level service provider to

arrive at the scene of a 911 call more rapidly, and result in an increase in performance of the County's overall Emergency Medical Services (EMS) system.

HSA staff have met with the executive committee of the Emergency Medical Services Integration Authority (EMSIA) on several occasions to discuss fire services integration into EMS.

Currently, the Aptos LaSelva fire district has ALS response capabilities on all of their engines, and the Central Fire Protection District (CFPD) has ALS capabilities on one engine, with hopes of extending those capabilities to the three other CFPD stations assuming the successful outcome of a one-year pilot program which began in late October, 1998. HSA has been advised that Santa Cruz Fire also hopes to have ALS capability in the near future. At present, none of the fire districts providing, or planning to provide, ALS services propose transporting individuals.

As you know, HSA has concerns regarding quality and skills maintenance if the number of ALS providers within the EMS system is increased. The EMS Medical Director has established an expert committee to review the issue, and the EMS Medical Director and EMSIA quality assurance coordinator independently provide a review of each ALS call within the Central Fire Protection District. In the first two months of service of Central's pilot program, there were 122 calls, with 57% requiring ALS-level skills. To qualify as an ALS-level call, an assessment, procedure, or medication must be utilized that requires a paramedic level of training. There have been no untoward incidents with any of these calls.

At the last meeting between HSA and EMSIA, there was agreement that a workplan be developed for 1999, with a specific focus on further fire service integration into the EMS system. It was agreed that by March or April of 1999, HSA and EMSIA will organize a forum to discuss the development of a five-year strategic implementation plan for enhancing the EMS delivery system within the County.

Forum participants are expected to include HSA, EMSIA, members of both the Emergency Medical Care Commission and the Ambulance Contract Compliance Commission, the Pre-hospital Advisory Committee, the Medical Executive Committee, American Medical Response West (the County's ambulance provider), and others. Specific areas of interest to be addressed will include the following:

- The establishment of a mechanism to evaluate requests of individual fire districts wishing to establish engine-based ALS services, so that HSA and the Board of Supervisors may be recipients of the advice and counsel of the EMS community;
- An evaluation of response times to highlight areas for improvement of the entire system through changes in ambulance deployment. This topic assumes fire services will be providing ALS services more widely within the system, which will capitalize on the positive system impacts of new ALS engine companies as they are introduced to the system;
- The ongoing maintenance of adequate quality assurance measurements and programs needs to assure that the public safety is protected and enhanced.

- Funding mechanisms for quality assurance programs.
- Other issues will be discussed that relate to EMS/fire services issues.

HSA looks forward to continuing to work with EMSIA and the many other agencies involved in EMS to improve and enhance the County's system. We have been directed to report to your Board annually on progress made in fire service integration, and will do so with the annual date of November 16, 1999. An interim report will be included as part of the HSA 1999 budget presentation.

It is, therefore, RECOMMENDED that your Board:

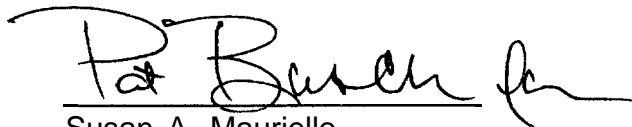
Accept and file this report regarding fire services integration into the County EMS system.

Sincerely,



Charles M. Moody  
HSA Administrator

RECOMMENDED:



Susan A. Mauriello  
County Administrative Officer

GW/CMM/amg

cc: CAO  
Auditor-Controller  
County Counsel  
Emergency Medical Services  
Emergency Medical Services Integration Authority  
Emergency Medical Care Commission  
Ambulance Contract Compliance Commission  
HSA Administration  
Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital  
Watsonville Community Hospital  
Sutter Maternity and Surgery Center