



County of Santa Cruz⁰¹¹⁹

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY
ADMINISTRATION

November 27, 2001

Board Agenda: December 11, 2001

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
Santa Cruz County
701 Ocean Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

**Subject: Approve Alternative Training Program for Emergency
Ambulance Advanced Life Support Staff**

Dear Members of the Board:

I. Background

In 1997 your Board approved a five year contract for ambulance services with American Medical Response West (AMR) beginning December 1, 1997. This contract was amended on November 16, 1999 to revise language dealing with excess revenues and on September 11, 2001 to clarify accounting requirements, to align the fiscal year of the contract with that of the Contractor, and to clarify requirements for Board approval of the training program for new staff.

This letter is to provide your Board an update on the training program and its elements. In addition, it is necessary for your Board to approve any continuation of the alternative training program. Part Five, Business and Workplace Practices, section B (e) of the contract describes the minimum orientation activities for newly hired EMT-paramedic staff. The existing contract language provides that in the event the Contractor's turnover ratio exceeds twenty (20) percent in any given quarter, the Contractor may submit a written alternative field orientation plan to the Health Services Agency (HSA) Administrator requesting the employee orientation and training be modified. Alternative plans approved by the HSA Administrator may remain in effect for six (6) months. The HSA Administrator may grant two three (3) month extensions. Further extensions must be approved by the Board of Supervisors.

In November 2000 in response to high attrition and a greater volume of new paramedics entering the system, AMR requested that HSA approve an alternative training plan which included considerable additions and enhancements to the original process. AMR has had difficulty maintaining the stability and low turnover in the workforce since the Fire Agencies began adding advanced life support services to its engines. While this has

been difficult for AMR, it has insured that the Fire Agencies have experienced staff with good clinical skills. This had been an area of concern when Fire Agencies began providing advanced life support services. Although the public and private sector paramedics earn nearly equivalent salaries, the attraction of a civil service position, especially with regard to retirement benefits, has motivated many private paramedics to work toward positions in the fire service. The attached graph "Full-Time Paramedic Turnover" reflects this situation. The turnover and attrition of paramedics has continued unabated and HSA has approved two extensions of the alternative training program.

II. Proposed Training Program Recommendation

The contract requires that all newly hired or newly transferred paramedics with less than six (6) months field experience be placed on a minimum six (6) month probationary period. During the probationary period, the employee may only be assigned to a shift on which the employee will be supervised by a Contractor's certified Field Training Officer (FTO). The contract requires three (3) FTO positions for pairing with new staff. Since the contract was first implemented, AMR has met this provision by moving otherwise permanently placed paramedics to shift assignments so that a FTO could be the new hire's partner during this six month period. Even with increasing the number of FTO positions by two over the contract requirements, there are still not enough to handle the current level of new staff being trained and evaluated. There continues to be a large number of new hires (16 trainee staff in November 2001) as Fire Agencies add new advanced life support engines.

An alternative field training program was developed proactively to replace and simultaneously enhance the previous program. The attached "New Employee Development Program" displays the phases of the new training program, and the amount of time the new hire spends in each phase. The program includes pre-employment screening with a personal interview and both written and skills examinations, an AMR New Employee Academy, a local division briefing/orientation, and three field training phases. The field training includes orientation and evaluation by an AMR FTO, an EMS Agency orientation by the County EMS Administrator, County accreditation, and additional FTO evaluation. During the field training phase, the new hire works as the third person on an ambulance so the FTO can concentrate on the new hire's patient care skills. This is a higher standard of training than the original training program and provides extra clinical benefits. It is also more intensive than the Fire Agency orientations for their paramedics in the medical skills area.

At the conclusion of the field training, the new employee works on restricted duty with an experienced partner. The new employee will have a six month probationary period during which time 100% review of his or her Patient Care Records for patient care will be performed. The employee will also have a Quality Leadership Council (QLC) mentor who will provide field coaching. Patient care records will be reviewed by the Clinical and Educational Services (CES) Coordinator, FTOs, and QLC. At 90 days the paramedic will complete a written test on mapping and navigation, and at 120 days a written test on policies and clinical protocols.

HSA has taken the following steps to evaluate the new training program:

1. Received monthly reports on the progress of the alternative training program; and
2. Reviewed the written and skills exams and the FTO evaluations of new employees; and

3. Reviewed check ride evaluations of new employees; and
4. Insured new employees completed County accreditation checklists and passed written navigation and protocol tests; and
5. Audited a sample of the patient records of trainees; and
6. Reviewed other documentation of the mentoring by the QLC during the probationary period, as well as the probationary consultation review for the initial group of eight employees in the trial program; and
7. The AMR CES Coordinator has also reported on the program during Quality Assurance sessions of the Pre-hospital Advisory Committee for critique by the EMS Medical Director and other medical staff.

The trial training period has met its objectives in preparing the new hires to work effectively and independently as paramedics in Santa Cruz County. HSA recommends that the alternative training program be extended for one year. Because the Central Fire Protection District and the Watsonville Fire Department are planning to add new paramedic engines, we do not anticipate stabilization in the workforce for another 18 months. AMR has also made significant efforts in employee retention with its recent five (5) year labor Master Contract which increased salaries six (6) percent or greater each year for the Santa Cruz operational area.

It is, therefore, RECOMMENDED that your Board:

1. Direct the Health Services Agency to continue intensive monitoring of the alternative paramedic training program, and report back on or before December 10, 2002, with updated staff retention figures and identification of any issues which need to be addressed in maintaining high quality paramedic training; and
2. Approve a one-year extension of the American Medical Response West's alternative paramedic training program.

Sincerely,



Rama K. Khalsa, Ph.D.
Health Services Administrator

RECOMMENDED



Susan A. Mauriello
County Administrative Officer

Attachments: Paramedic Turnover Statistics
New Employee Development Program

cc:	County Administrative Office	American Medical Response West
	County Counsel	Emergency Medical Services Manager
	Auditor-Controller	EMCC
	Health Services Administration	

PARAMEDIC TURNOVER STATISTICS

Quarter Ending	FT resignations (quarter)	FT employees in SC County	% Turnover (quarter)	FT changes (Cum)	Employees hired by Fire Depts
Dec-97	0	31	0%	0	0
Feb-98	1	31	3%	1	1
May-98	0	31	0%	1	0
Aug-98	2	31	6%	3	0
Dec-98	1	31	3%	4	1
Feb-99	0	31	0%	4	0
May-99	1	31	3%	5	1
Aug-99	1	31	3%	6	1
Dec-99	4	31	13%	10	4
Feb-00	1	31	3%	11	1
May-00	1	31	3%	12	1
Aug-00	2	31	6%	14	1
Dec-00	7	31	23%	21	7
Feb-01	3	31	10%	24	3
May-01	3	31	10%	27	2
Aug-01	0	31	0%	27	0
Dec-01	8	31	26%	35	7

New Employee Development Program

Pre-Employment Screening

Application Screening	Interview	Written Exam
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If Successful (

Classroom Training

New Employee Academy	Local Division Briefing
40 hours	16 hours

If Successful (

Field Training Third Person Only

Phase I Patient Care Only	Phase II Accreditation	Phase III All Skills
72 hours	5 calls	72 hours

If Successful (

Restricted Duty

100% Call Review				
Mapping Navigation Test	Performance Review Meeting	Policy and Protocol Test	Performance Review Meeting	Probationary Exit Interview
6 Months				

If Successful (

Independent Duty Restricted to Senior Partner Only
6 Months

If Successful (

Independent Duty No Partner Restriction
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