

August 5, 2002

Honorable Rodney S. Melville, Presiding Judge
Santa Barbara County Superior Court
312-C East Cook Street
PO Box 21107
Santa Maria, California 93456-5369

Mary Anne Harrison, Foreperson
2001-02 Grand Jury
1100 Anacapa Street-
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

**Board of Supervisor's Response to the 2001-2002 Grand Jury Report on:
*"Emergency Medical Services"***

Dear Judge Melville and Ms. Harrison:

During its regular meeting of August 13, 2002, the Board of Supervisors adopted the following responses as its responses to the findings and recommendations in the 2001-02 Grand Jury's report on "Emergency Medical Services". These responses are aligned with those provided by the Sheriff, Public Health, and Fire Department's, with an additional comment to Finding 3 and Recommendation 3 as indicated below.

FINDING 1: Santa Barbara County Public Safety Dispatch Center is not staffed by trained Emergency Medical Dispatchers.

RESPONSE: The Board adopted the Sheriff and Fire Department's responses as its response.

Response to Finding 1: The Sheriff Department agrees with this finding.

In addition, during the week of September 9th, 2002, the dispatchers employed at the Santa Barbara County Public Safety Dispatch Center will be trained in the procedures and policies of emergency medical dispatching.

Response to Finding 1: The Fire Department agrees with this finding.

RECOMMENDATION 1: The Grand Jury recommends the Sheriff expedite the training of all Emergency Dispatchers to be Emergency Medical Dispatchers. The proper training would improve the safety of the ambulance crews and the general public by authorizing trips not requiring lights and sirens or the response of the Fire Department.

RESPONSE: The Board's adopted the Sheriff and Fire Department's response as indicated below.

Response to Recommendation 1: (Sheriff) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented.

The training of dispatchers within the Santa Barbara County Public Safety Dispatch Center in the policy and procedures of Emergency Medical Dispatching will begin the week of September 9th, 2002. After the training period, EMD will be fully implemented and become operational for the County Dispatch Center. The Fire Departments within the County will have to evaluate their own policies as to responses to medical calls within their respective jurisdictions. If they agree to the prioritization procedures of EMD, then this recommendation will be fully met.

Response to Recommendation 1: The Fire Department agrees that the training and implementation of the Emergency Medical Dispatch needs to be a high priority.

Working with the Sheriff's Department, EMS, and AMR, the department has supported moving to this level of service. The department believes that the tiered level of response is the most logical for the safety of the first responders as well as for the public we serve.

FINDING 2: Santa Barbara County Public Safety Dispatch Center does not have a written policy or proper protocol established for dispatchers regarding interrogation, prioritized dispatch and pre-arrival instructions. Without such a policy and protocol, the County is open to liability should a Dispatcher erroneously offer "Good Samaritan" medical advice.

RESPONSE: The Board adopted the Sheriff, Fire, and Public Health Department's responses as its response.

Response to Finding 2: The Sheriff Department agrees with this finding.

In addition, dispatchers will be EMD trained beginning the week of September 9th, 2002 and the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department (PHD) will monitor and evaluate the Emergency Medical Dispatch program (EMD) through the office of Emergency Medical Services. Written policy and protocols have been developed by the PHD EMS. These will be included as training materials the week of September 9 and will be implemented by the Santa Barbara County Public Safety Dispatch Center upon the conclusion of the training.

Response to Finding 2: The Fire Department agrees with this finding.

The Fire Department is aware of this need and supports the adoption of these medical protocols.

Response to Finding 2: The Public Health Department agrees partially with this finding.

The Public Health Department Emergency Medical Services Agency (EMS Agency) has developed emergency medical dispatch (EMD) policies and protocols for the Santa Barbara County Public Safety Dispatch Center using the Ventura County policies and protocols as a model. However, these written policies and protocols have not been introduced to the dispatchers at the Santa Barbara County Public Safety Dispatch Center yet.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Adopt the medical protocols offered by the County Medical Director of Emergency Medical Services. These protocols are presently being used by Ventura County

RESPONSE: The Board adopted the Sheriff and Public Health Department's responses as its response.

Response to Recommendation 2: The recommendation has not yet been implemented by the Sheriff's Department, but will be implemented in the future.

The Santa Barbara County Public Safety Dispatch Center is adopting the policies and procedures of the Medical Director of Emergency Medical Services of the County of Santa Barbara. These protocols will be used in the training of dispatch personnel in September 2002 when they are taught EMD. After training, Emergency Medical Dispatching will be implemented by the Santa Barbara County Public Safety Dispatch Center.

Response to Recommendation 2: This recommendation has not been implemented yet by the Public Health Department EMS. It will be implemented once training is completed in September 2002.

The County's Public Safety Dispatch Center within the Sheriff Department will implement the program. The County's EMS Agency has developed an EMD Program to include policies and protocols using the Ventura County system as a model. A training curriculum has been developed and a forty-hour EMD Dispatcher course is scheduled for September 9-13, 2002. The EMS Agency staff will provide the course, and once the Sheriff's dispatchers have completed this course the program can be implemented at the County's Public Safety Dispatch Center.

FINDING 3: The Santa Barbara County Public Safety Dispatch Center and a software consultant have been working to install and modify a CAD system to provide the County emergency Medical Services Department with electronic data so that it can monitor AMR's response time as required by the existing contract.

RESPONSE: The Board adopted the Sheriff Department's response as its response, with the following additional comment: Commencing July 2002, EMS electronic data began transferring in real time to the Public Health Department Office of EMS. However, some manual data transfers were necessary to provide complete information. Recently, the electronic data transmission has been more reliable and consistent. It is anticipated that the data for July 2002, and thereafter, will be available to fully monitor AMR's response time as required by the existing contract.

Response to Finding 3: The Sheriff's Department agrees with this finding.

The material related to this finding has been completed by the software contractor. The data requested by the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department - Office of Emergency Medical Services is being transferred from the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) computer in the Santa Barbara County Public Safety Dispatch Center and is being electronically transferred in real time to Public Health's EMS office.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Expedite the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) System effort presently in final testing, permitting the County Emergency Medical staff to monitor AMR performance without the manual efforts now required of AMR.

RESPONSE: The Board adopted the Sheriff Department's response as the BOS response, with the additional following comment: Commencing July 2002, EMS electronic data began transferring in real time to the Public Health Department Office of EMS. However, some manual data transfers were necessary to provide complete information. Recently, the electronic data transmission has been more reliable and consistent. It is anticipated that the data for July 2002, and thereafter, will be available to fully monitor AMR's response time as required by the existing contract.

Response to Recommendation 3: (Sheriff) This recommendation has been implemented.

The software vendor has finished the changes to the CAD system that allow the transfer of data on AMR responses to the Emergency Medical Services office of the County of Santa Barbara Department of Public Health. The data has been transferred from the dispatch center to public health since the middle of July 2002.

FINDING 4: Individuals with billing problems or questions must work via telephone or mail with American Medical Response's (AMR) central billing office located outside Santa Barbara County.

RESPONSE: The Board adopted the Public Health Department's response as its response.

Response to Finding 4: The Public Health Department agrees with this finding.

The EMS Agency is working with AMR's management team to establish a local billing liaison.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The County should arrange for the availability of a local office for users of AMR services to meet with AMR to resolve billing and payment issues. This should be included in the AMR contract.

RESPONSE: The Board adopted the Public Health Department's response as its response.

Response to Recommendation 4: The recommendation has been implemented.

A local telephone number is now included on bills for AMR services in Santa Barbara County. This number was included in bills commencing August 1, 2002 and will continue to be included in all future bills. Users of AMR services will be able to meet with AMR staff at the Buellton office to resolve billing issues. The AMR contract will be amended by Oct. 1, 2002 to reflect this as a contract requirement.

FINDING 5: AMR is not permitted to invoice for any service provided unless a transport service was completed.

RESPONSE: The Board adopted the Public Health Department's response as its response.

Response to Finding 5: The Public Health Department agrees with this finding.

Medicare and other insurance providers will not pay for paramedic response unless transport is provided. Consequently, AMR's contract currently does not permit them to invoice services unless transport is provided.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Add a classification to the County contract to cover services furnished by AMR that do not include ambulance transport. The Federal Government is recognizing this new charge for Medicare patients as Paramedic ALS (Advance Life Support) Intercept (PI).

RESPONSE: The Board adopted the Public Health Department's response as its response.

Response to Recommendation 5: The Public Health Department will not implement this recommendation because it is not reasonable.

The Advance Life Support (ALS) Intercept classification as identified in the Federal Document from Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA), now known as Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is not an allowable fee in California. The Paramedic Advance Life Support (ALS) Intercept (PI) classification, is only for non-transport providers, and is only an allowable fee for the State of New York. New York is allowed this fee because of their system design. This is not an allowable Medicare fee for any other state.

The EMS Agency does not think that it is reasonable to charge individuals for a service that is not reimbursable by third party payers. The current fee schedule established in Santa Barbara County recognizes and incorporates the cost transport providers have of providing ALS services without transport.

The Board of Supervisors thanks the Grand Jury for its report on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Gail Marshall
Chair, Board of Supervisors

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Attachments

cc: Roger Heroux, Director Public Health Department
John Scherrei, Fire Chief
Jim Thomas, Sheriff