

October 20, 2011

To whom it may concern:

SUBJECT: On tiered response to medical 9-1-1 calls

Recently, there have been reports in the local news regarding the effectiveness and composition of emergency teams responding to medical 9-1-1 calls. Sunnybrook has been mentioned in some of these articles and in discussions about the training and medical direction provided for these teams. We would like to clarify our position with respect to pre-hospital care and the system in place to respond to 9-1-1 medical emergencies in Toronto and other jurisdictions.

Medical tiered response refers to the dispatch of both paramedics and emergency first responders (generally firefighters) to potentially life-threatening medical 9-1-1 calls. Communities that have included first responders as part of a tiered response have uniformly demonstrated improved survival for victims of cardiac arrest. Other indications are not as closely studied, but first responders should be included as part of tiered response where there is a suspected threat to life. In fact, Sunnybrook's medical directors continually review criteria for optimal use of first responders.

Paramedics are dedicated and distinct professional healthcare providers who make complex medical decisions about their patients. They are able to recognize and treat acute clinical problems such as trauma, stroke, and heart attacks using a wide range of diagnostic equipment and medications, and then select appropriate health care facilities to ensure an optimal outcome. The intense initial and on-going education required to be a paramedic requires a substantial commitment and means they need a singular focus on patient care to achieve and maintain this level of skill.

First responders, many of whom are firefighters that have completed comprehensive training programs, are an important part of the EMS response to calls for medical assistance. Firefighter first responders can also support patient care by providing specialized rescue or extrication equipment in specific circumstances, and assist paramedics as necessary.

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Sunnybrook's Centre for Prehospital Medicine provides medical direction, leadership and advice in the provision of pre-hospital emergency health care within a broad based, multi-disciplinary, community emergency health services system. Our mandate is medical oversight for EMS systems in the City of Toronto, Regions of Peel and Halton, County of Simcoe, District of Muskoka, and First Nations communities in Beausoleil and Rama Mnjikaning, We have been called upon to consult on the development of systems of pre-hospital emergency care internationally.

Based on our research and experience, we believe that we have one of the best and highly coordinated systems of pre-hospital care in the world. Our numbers demonstrate that the regions we serve have some of the best performance in areas such as clinical care, survival from cardiac arrest, reduction in morbidity, and adherence to medical protocols.

As medical directors at the Sunnybrook Centre for Prehospital Medicine, we are privileged to work with paramedics, firefighters and other emergency responders every day. It is our opinion that the best pre-hospital care is provided by highly skilled paramedics supported by trained first responders through a structured and evidence-based tiered response system. We encourage constructive discussion and urge all of the parties involved to keep the needs of the patient first and foremost in their minds.

Sincerely,



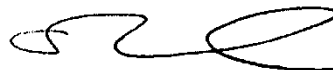
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