

July 9, 2002

The Honorable Rodney S. Melville
Presiding Judge, Santa Barbara Superior Court
312-C East Cook Street
Santa Maria, CA 93456-5369

Grand Jury Foreperson
1100 Anacapa Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Re: Response to Findings and Recommendations contained in the 2001-2002 Grand Jury
Report on **Emergency Medical Services**

Dear Judge Melville and Grand Jury Foreperson:

Finding #2: Santa Barbara County Public Safety Dispatch Center does not have a written policy or proper protocol established for dispatchers regarding interrogation, prioritization 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.

Public Health Department Response: *Disagree partially.*

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.

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.

Public Health Department Response: *Agree.*

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

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

Public Health Department Response: *Agree*

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

Public Health Department Response: *This recommendation has not been implemented yet. It will be implemented once the 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 (40) EMD Dispatcher course is scheduled for September 9-12, 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.

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.

Public Health Department Response: *The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented by August 1, 2002.*

A local telephone number will be included on bills for AMR services in Santa Barbara County beginning August 1, 2002. Users of AMR services will be able to meet with AMR staff at the Buellton office to resolve billing issues. The contract will be amended by Sept. 1, 2002 to make this a contract requirement.

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).

Public Health Department Response: *The recommendation will not be implemented 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.

It should be noted that the newly revised Medicare guidelines allow for different levels of fees depending on the intensity of the service. Currently, our contract with AMR does not recognize varying fee levels. We will be amending the AMR contract by September 1, 2002, to allow for an Advance Life Support (ALS) fee if an ambulance responds to an emergency with an ALS ambulance.

Sincerely,

Roger E. Heroux, MPA
Director Public Health Department