

Fuel Cost Meeting

June 5, 2008

Lock Haven EMS

This special committee meeting was called to order at 5:30.

Tim thanked the individuals for attending and briefly outlined the reason for the meeting. At the May 7th special Council meeting a discussion was held as to the impact the rising fuel prices were having on provision of EMS services and what, if anything, Council could do to assist. Since not all service managers, and others knowledgeable in that area, are Council delegates it was decided to hold this special meeting, inviting everyone to attend - to get their input and discuss the issues/solutions/suggestions. Dave Jones, 1st Vice-Chair of Council then conducted the meeting.

A lengthy discussion ensued:

Issues:

- Cost for employees/volunteers to travel to station for calls/on-call or funds raising
- It was reported that fuel costs have risen approximately 50% over the past year with no noticeable increase in call volume (miles driven) or reimbursement received.
- Impact fuel costs are going to have (having) on ability to accept inter-facility transports and/or specialty transports. Medicare payments aren't keeping up with increased staffing costs not to mention operational costs. Further impact this will have on the hospital's ability to provide/ensure adequate patient care & transfer.
- Increases in costs have caused some of the services to decrease purchases (including replacement of vehicles).
- Increases in what it costs individuals to staff the ambulance, along with increased costs of business within the organization, with no increase in revenue have caused staffing problems in that services can't afford the increased payroll/benefits (even for volunteers) needed to keep adequate, competent staff – EMS isn't the best paying job in town.
- Regional services are looking at increased patient care issues with the return of winter as individuals will need to choose between heat, food, &/or medication possibly causing 1) CO poisonings 2) frostbite & hypothermia 3) mal-nutrition 4) medication issues.
- It was mentioned that this wasn't a new problem – just an increasing problem. It was mentioned that disposable income is decreasing for a majority of the population and as such fund raising activities, including yearly subscription, drives are and will continue to produce ever reducing revenue amounts.

- Some services have noted that it is/was costing them money to continue traditional fund raising activities such as bingo; therefore, they quit holding them.
- Fuel cost increases is expected to decrease attendance and participation, if not complete canceling, of annual summer parades – having a negative impact on that fund raising activity as less people will attend and if you don't attend my parade, I probably can't afford to attend yours.
- Not a new happening; But, with insurance Co-Pay checks going to the patient, some are keeping the payments to live on instead of turning them over to the service which provided the transport. Some individuals are calling for emergency transport just to get the money (?) so it may be in the best interest of the company to not bill for service (for those patients) and experience a decrease in calls (costs).
- Again, fund raising was discussed and the fact that not only is the money earned decreasing because of less “disposable” income; but, the services can't afford to heat their stations to conduct the fund raising activities.

Possible Solutions:

- Discussion on tax credit/rebates for volunteers. Senator Baker has introduced SB 1314. Others are expected.
- Is everyone registered to have the state fuel tax off their purchases? If not, the paperwork is available. Bob Cooney provided copies of the application and Jim will post it on Council's website. Need to check on federal tax exemption.
- Scott Rhoat (Bellefonte) mentioned that he has received information from Rep. Benninghoff concerning legislation requiring power companies to charge volunteer fire/ambulance organizations at the residential rate – not commercial. Services need to check to see what rate they are being charged.
- Lock Haven EMS noted that they noticed considerable savings by decreasing the idol time that the units experience – both at station and the hospital.
- Milroy has instituted a partial fuel cost subsidy which they are offering their staff to help decrease the impact they are experiencing. This is costing the company additional funds; but, is instituted in hopes to maintain the needed staffing.
- Encourage legislation for insurance payment of EMS services directly to the service provider or, at minimum, list the service as payee with required endorsement.
- Tagging on the item above. Scott Rhoat (Bellefonte) stated that he has had better luck on delinquent accounts by going to the local judge (magistrate) and filing criminal charges against the person than sending the bill to a collection agency. The local judge has worked with Bellefonte EMS and it has worked very well plus when payment is received, not all accounts are cleared, but a considerable amount; they receive the total due not a portion due to collection agency fees.
- Suggestions were presented for group purchasing; purchase of used/demo vehicles vs. new; and sharing of manpower.

- Partnering. For everything: purchasing power of larger quantity, sharing of manpower; joint fundraising; equipment sharing.
- Discussion was held as to possibly getting a presentation list together, or such, and meeting with legislators to discuss the issues – maybe a breakfast? It was suggested we bring a legislator on-board to have the meeting so it doesn't look like we are lobbying. We are providing information.
- We need to share the information from tonight's meeting with the rest of the providers throughout the Region and continue to compile/distribute "best practices".
- It was agreed that we need to look at provision of EMS and determine "Job equivalencies" to other healthcare positions – within and outside the hospital. It was agreed that we as a whole (the EMS system) doesn't do a good job at promoting our services and showing our worth. We need to do that.

It was agreed that this discussion needs to continue. Dave asked Kent Knable and Scott Rhoat (and hopefully Mick Abrashoff) with the help of Gerard Banfill to coordinate activities related to this topic and keep this process moving forward.

The meeting was adjourned approximately 7:15 pm

Attendance (Fuel Meeting)

- 1) Vana Dainty, Bellefonte Gazette
- 2) Romaine Naylor, Centre Communities Chapter, ARC
- 3) Meecha Bechdel, Centre Communities Chapter, ARC
- 4) Steve Bills, Nittany Valley QRS
- 5) Chris Rupert, Nittany Valley QRS
- 6) Rusty Blessard, Bucktail Medical Center
- 7) Jim Watson, Beech Creek/Blanchard EMS
- 8) Cathy Grimes, Seven Mountains EMS Council
- 9) Scott Rhoat, Bellefonte EMS
- 10) Phil Lucas, Mifflin County EMA
- 11) Kent Knable, Centre LifeLink EMS
- 12) Jim Urban, Seven Mountains EMS Council
- 13) Dave Jones, University Ambulance Service – PSU
- 14) Sandra Foster, Moshannon Valley EMS
- 15) Sharon Nilson, Snow Shoe EMS
- 16) Debra Smeal, Centre County Ambulance Association
- 17) Bob Cooney, Bureau of EMS – PA Dept. of Health
- 18) Gerard Banfill, Lock Haven EMS
- 19) Todd Shook, Goodwill Hose Co. Amb./Penns Valley EMS
- 20) Brandon Burns, Milesburg Fire Co. QRS
- 21) Tim Hardy, Milesburg Fire Co. QRS
- 22) Tim Nilson, Seven Mountains EMS Council