

Complex System | Clearly Defined



Articles that explore health care issues in our LHIN

EMS a Vital Link to Emergency Care

“9-1-1, what is your emergency?”

“I need an ambulance – NOW!”

While hospitals, and their Emergency Departments, are the destination on most people’s minds in an emergency, it is the timely care of paramedics in your home, at the scene of an accident or in a public venue that can mean the difference between life and death.

With an Emergency Medical Services (EMS) standard median response time of 11 minutes, 20 seconds across the province in 2008, Ontarian’s can rest comfortably knowing that paramedics are ready to respond. The paramedics of today have increased capabilities and training to be the first medical responders to treat patients en route to the nearest Emergency Department. It’s no longer a matter of simply getting the patient to a hospital as quickly as possible, now EMS are focused on beginning medical assistance for the patient.

“When I started we had an oxygen tank, a gurney and Band-Aids... it was a matter of just getting the patient to the hospital as fast as possible and hope they made it. That mindset has changed and for the better. It’s life-saving patient improvement,” said Bruce Krauter, Operations Manager at Sun Parlour Emergency Medical Services, Chatham-Kent. Krauter explained how the role of EMS has changed dramatically since he began his career in 1982 as a paramedic.

“The most beneficial changes for the patient have been the addition of defibrillators,

symptom relief drugs and enhanced airway techniques,” said Krauter. Symptom relief drugs such as

“We’re not just taking them to the hospital, we’re doing everything we can along the way,”

ASA or nitroglycerin for cardiac patients, anaphylactic drugs for severe allergies or D-50 for diabetic patients in those minutes en route to the local emergency department could mean life or death for the patient.

Despite the drastic increase in the level of care paramedics provide,

“9-1-1, what is your emergency?”

“I need an ambulance – NOW!”

and the technology and medicine that travels with them to calls,

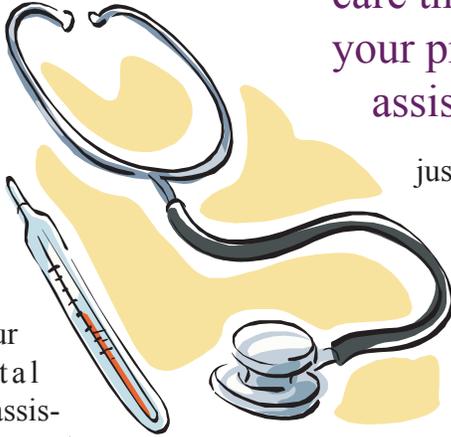
EMS are not fully recognized for the vital role they play in health care's emergency medical system.

“The EMS is sometimes overlooked in the health care theme, but they are your pre-hospital medical assistance... We are always looking at ways to enhance and advance patient care before they get to the hospital,” said Krauter.

Chatham-Kent has 100 full and part time Primary Care Paramedics serving the municipality of 110,000 residents from stations in Chatham, Wallaceburg, Tilbury, Thamesville, Ridgetown and Blenheim. In 2008, Sun Parlour EMS responded to a total of 17,103 calls for service with a 90th percentile response time of 13 minutes, 24 seconds, which means 90 per cent of emergency calls were responded to in that time or less. Their average response time for Code 4 calls only (CTAS 1 - emergency, life or death) was 6 minutes, 59 seconds.

In the past year Sun Parlour EMS, Chatham-Kent has added an advanced airway technique to their capabilities. Now, paramedics are able to control the airway and get air directly to the lungs. “This is

“The EMS is sometimes overlooked in the health care theme, but they are your pre-hospital medical assistance...”



just below intubation and much more beneficial to the patient,” said Krauter. Also new in Chatham-Kent is the IV start program that allows paramedics to start an IV and get fluids into the patient. “We’re not just taking them to the hospital, we’re doing everything we can along the way,” added Krauter.

Looking ahead, Krauter would like to have electronic health records available in the EMS units to educate paramedics of the patient’s medical history and forward the patient’s most up-to-the-minute status to the incoming emergency department.

Paramedics are doing more than ever before for their patients, but Jeff Brooks, Acting Manager, Lambton Emergency Medical Services, would like to see their capabilities increase.

“I’d like to see all paramedics have better tools to deal with

patients’ pain... pain is common and Primary Care Paramedics do not have pain relievers,” he said. Another area of concern he has is for patients with seizure disorders. “There are some really good drugs out there to treat seizures... if we could stop someone’s seizure at the scene or en route, it might mean a better outcome for the patient down the road,” he said.

Lambton EMS responded to approximately 16,000 calls in 2008 with a 90th percentile rate of 11 minutes. With nine stations in Brigden, Corunna, Forest, Grand Bend, Petrolia, Sarnia (2), Thedford and Watford, the service employs 150 full and part-time paramedics, including 10 Advanced Care Paramedics (ACP). Lambton EMS also uses the newest techniques such as Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP), which Brooks described like a splint to keep the airway open and give oxygen. Paramedics can now



“ACPs (Advanced Care Paramedics) are spread throughout the region and can administer narcotics; give advanced oxygen, intubation, cardiac pacing and other possibly life-saving procedures. All paramedics recertify every year on defibrillation and symptom relief drugs.”

start IVs to get fluids started into the patient.

“The demands placed on paramedics are so much greater than years gone by. The amount of drugs, the responsibilities... it really is a profession, not just a technician... they are decision-makers,” said Brian Bildfell, Director, Land Ambulance Services, Windsor-Essex EMS.

The Windsor-Essex EMS received 49,000 calls for service in 2008 with a 90th percentile response time of 9 minutes, 24 seconds. As the largest EMS in the Erie St. Clair LHIN region, Windsor-Essex has 225 full and part time paramedics throughout the county and in the City of Windsor. The fleet consists of 35 ambulances along with 2

trailers, 7 Emergency Response Units and 2 administration vehicles.

Within the Windsor-Essex EMS, there are 38 ACPs and 117 Primary Care Paramedics (PCPs) full time staff. The ACPs are spread throughout the region and can administer narcotics; give advanced oxygen, intubation, cardiac pacing and other possibly life-saving procedures. All paramedics recertify every year on defibrillation and symptom relief drugs.

Windsor-Essex EMS has a fully operational Haz-Mat team (Hazardous Materials) with training in advanced techniques. Once a year, the service organizes a one-day mock major incident involving all emergency services – police,

fire, EMS and local hospitals. Past exercises have included a farm rescue, water rescue and this year will focus on tactical emergencies.

The transformation from attendants to medics is more than just a name change, it's a total progression and evolution in the services provided by today's EMS. Armed with more drugs, equipment and training than ever before, EMS is the medical liaison between the site of the medical emergency and the nearest emergency department. While the image of EMS may be stuck in the past, the services they provide are steadily moving forward in an ever-changing health care landscape, where every human and technological resource is considered a precious asset.

www.eriestclairlhin.on.ca