

# Alternate Destination – Behavioral Health



Illustration by Ruben DeLuna

In response to a 911 call, community paramedics transport patients with behavioral health needs, but no emergent medical needs, to a mental health crisis center instead of to an emergency department (ED).

## Results (as of September 30, 2016)

- ▶ 98% of patients were evaluated at the behavioral health crisis center without the long delay of a preliminary ED visit.
- ▶ Less than 3% of patients required subsequent transfer to the ED, and there were no adverse outcomes. After refining the field medical evaluation protocols, the rate of transfer to an ED fell to zero.
- ▶ The project yielded savings for payers, primarily Medi-Cal, because screening behavioral health patients in the field for medical needs and transporting them directly to the mental health crisis center obviated the need for an ED visit with subsequent transfer from an ED to a behavioral health facility.
- ▶ For uninsured patients, the amount of uncompensated care provided by ambulance providers and hospitals also decreased.

## How It Works

Many California EDs are overcrowded. Some of the patients served in an ED could be treated safely and effectively in other settings, including some who arrive via ambulance.

Behavioral health patients are often transported to an ED for medical clearance or when there is no capacity to evaluate them at a crisis center. These patients can spend hours in an ED waiting for medical clearance, and in some cases they can spend days in the ED waiting for a bed at an inpatient behavioral health center, without getting definitive behavioral health care during their ED stay.

In Stanislaus County, community paramedics are dispatched in response to 911 calls that a dispatcher determines to be a behavioral health emergency or when another paramedic or a law enforcement officer identifies a patient with behavioral health needs. Community paramedics are also dispatched to the

mental health crisis center to assess patients who arrive on their own and who need to be medically cleared before being admitted to the county's inpatient psychiatric facility. The community paramedics provide these services as needed in addition to responding to traditional 911 calls.

Once on scene, a community paramedic assesses the patient for medical needs or intoxication due to alcohol or drug consumption. If the patient has no emergent medical needs, is not intoxicated, and is not violent, the community paramedic contacts the mental health crisis center to determine bed availability at the county inpatient psychiatric facility. Upon a patient's arrival, mental health professionals on the crisis center staff evaluate the patient to determine the most appropriate level of care for their condition. Eligibility is limited to nonelderly adults who are uninsured or enrolled in Medi-Cal because the county inpatient psychiatric facility does not accept patients with other health insurance.

## Partners

LOCAL EMS AGENCY	LEAD AGENCY	HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PARTNER	EMS PROVIDER PARTNER	LOCATION
Stanislaus County	Mountain Valley EMS	Stanislaus County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services	AMR Stanislaus County	Stanislaus County



For more information on community paramedicine programs operating today in California, visit [www.emsa.ca.gov/community\\_paramedicine](http://www.emsa.ca.gov/community_paramedicine).