

911 Hospice Calls



Illustration by Ruben DeLuna

In response to 911 calls, community paramedics collaborate with hospice agency nurses, patients, and family members to treat patients in their homes, according to their wishes, instead of transporting the patient to an emergency department (ED).

Results (as of September 30, 2016)

- ▶ Reduced rates of ambulance transports to an ED from 80% to 36%, preventing the loss of patients' hospice benefits and better meeting patients' wishes to receive care at home.
- ▶ Community paramedics mainly provided hospice patients and their families with psychosocial support and administered medications from the hospice patients' "comfort care" packs when necessary, in consultation with a hospice nurse.
- ▶ Saved money for Medicare and other payers.

How It Works

The goal of hospice care is to provide medical, psychological, and spiritual support to those dying from a terminal illness. Care is provided by a multidisciplinary team of health professionals and volunteers in a patient's place of residence. Hospice staff members tell hospice patients, their family members, and other caregivers to contact the hospice instead of 911 if they believe there is a medical need or if they become concerned about the patient's comfort.

Despite this instruction, some hospice patients and their family members call 911 instead of the hospice, because they are anxious about a patient's condition, they disagree with the patient's decision to obtain hospice care, or the patient decides to stop receiving hospice care. In other cases, patients or families may call 911 if they do not receive a prompt response from the hospice agency.

The standard response to a 911 call made on behalf of a hospice patient is to transport the patient to an ED. Being transported to an ED may be upsetting and uncomfortable for hospice patients, and ED clinicians may perform unwanted medical interventions, including

admission for inpatient care. Another negative outcome is that insurers may revoke hospice benefits if a patient receives treatment or hospitalization that is incompatible with the hospice approach of comfort care. In these cases, the patient must apply for reinstatement of their hospice benefits.

Ventura County's hospice project seeks to prevent unnecessary transport to an ED. The community paramedics are supervisors who can respond to hospice calls while other paramedics respond to other 911 calls. If a 911 dispatcher or a first responder on scene determines that a person is under the care of a hospice agency, a community paramedic is dispatched to the patient's place of residence. The community paramedic assesses the patient, talks with family members and caregivers, and contacts a registered nurse employed by the hospice agency. The hospice nurse determines with the community paramedic what care to provide. The hospice nurse may ask the community paramedic to wait with the patient until the nurse arrives. The hospice nurse may also direct the community paramedic to administer pain medications to the patient that the hospice has provided in a "comfort care" pack.

Partners

LOCAL EMS AGENCY	LEAD AGENCY	HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PARTNERS	EMS PROVIDER PARTNERS	LOCATION
Ventura	Ventura County EMS Agency	Assisted Home Care Services Hospice Buena Vista Hospice Care Livingston Memorial Visiting Nurse Association Roze Room Hospice TLC Home Hospice	AMR Ventura Gold Coast Ambulance LifeLine Ambulance	Ventura County



For more information on community paramedicine programs operating today in California, visit www.emsa.ca.gov/community_paramedicine.