

# 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 and according to their wishes instead of transporting them to the emergency department (ED).

transports occurred when a patient requested it or when they had a medical need that could not be met in their home, such as a bone fracture. Community paramedics also alerted hospice agencies and family members to patients' needs for additional assistance (e.g., a caregiver to stay overnight with the patient to assist with safe transfers and help avoid falls).

- ▶ The project potentially saved about \$203,700 (an average of \$755 per patient) for Medicare and other payers by reducing ambulance transports and ED visits.

## Results (as of September 30, 2017)

- ▶ 270 people were enrolled in a pilot project involving 911 hospice calls at one site in southern California. Community paramedics visited patients in their homes, which were either private residences, or skilled nursing or residential care facilities.
- ▶ Prior to this pilot project, 80% of 911 hospice calls resulted in ambulance transport of a patient to the ED. This dropped to 30% for patients participating in the pilot project. Not being transported to the ED preserves hospice benefits and better meets the wishes of patients who prefer to receive home care.
- ▶ After conducting an assessment to determine that the patient could remain at home under hospice care, the community paramedics provided hospice patients and their families with emotional support and, when necessary, administered medications from the patients' "comfort care" packs (these contain medications to help manage the patient's symptoms) as directed by a hospice nurse. ED

## 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 calling 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 or their family members/caregivers call 911, which typically leads to the hospice patient being transported to an ED. This may be upsetting and uncomfortable for hospice patients, and ED clinicians may perform unwanted medical interventions, including admission for inpatient care. In addition, insurers may revoke hospice benefits if a patient receives treatment or hospitalization that is incompatible with the hospice approach of comfort care.

Ventura County's hospice project seeks to prevent transports to an ED that are not consistent with a patient's wishes. 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 paramedics are supervisors who can respond to hospice calls while other paramedics respond to 911 calls. 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 directs the community paramedic regarding what care to provide. The hospice nurse may ask the community paramedic to wait with the patient until the nurse arrives or direct the community paramedic to administer pain or other medications to the patient that the hospice has provided in a "comfort care" pack.

See reverse side for a list of partners.

## Partners

| LOCAL EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES (EMS) AGENCY | LEAD AGENCY               | HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PARTNERS  | EMS PROVIDER PARTNERS   | LOCATION       |
|---|---------------------------|--|---|----------------|
| Ventura County                                | Ventura County EMS Agency | Assisted Home Care Services Hospice<br>Buena Vista Hospice Care<br>Livingston Memorial Visiting Nurse Association<br>Roze Room Hospice<br>TLC Home Hospice | American Medical Response (AMR)<br>Gold Coast Ambulance<br>LifeLine Ambulance | Ventura 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).