

Emergency Department Status Policy December 2008

Background

The goal of EMS and hospital Emergency Departments is to provide the best possible care to all patients as quickly and seamlessly as possible. To this end, EMS must be able to transport patients in their care to the closest appropriate hospital consistent with the nature of the patient's problem and, when possible, the patient's wishes. Once at the hospital Emergency Department, EMS must also be able to turn the patient's care over to the Emergency Department staff in a timely fashion. Similarly, the Emergency Department must have the available space and staff to accept and begin caring for each patient in a timely fashion.

There are times when Emergency Departments are functioning at or above capacity, thus limiting their ability to promptly begin caring for newly arriving patients. Historically, in these situations, Emergency Departments have attempted to limit the number of patients arriving via EMS. While doing so may alleviate the immediate problem in the Emergency Department, it does not address the root cause of the problem. Diverting an ambulance to another facility is also often not in the best interests of the patient, whose medical records and physicians are likely at the hospital the patient requested transport to.

With these factors in mind, EMSI's Board of Directors has adopted the following policy for the EMSI Region.

Policy

All hospital Emergency Departments are considered to be open and available to accept patients via EMS unless they are on Condition Black (defined below). EMS crews are not obligated to honor hospital Emergency Departments' statements that they are "on diversion", "on bypass", "on [Condition] Red" or similar terminology.

Treatment Delay Advisory

Emergency Departments may notify EMS that they are on "Treatment Delay Advisory" when they are functioning at or above capacity. The term indicates that the patient may experience a delay in obtaining further evaluation or treatment by the Emergency Department. The patient (and EMS) may use this information in determining the most appropriate destination for getting the patient the required care. It is not intended to indicate that the patient may not be transported to that hospital.

This advisory expires after 4 (four) hours unless renewed.

Condition Black

A hospital/facility may be reported in "Condition Black" when an emergency situation or catastrophic event exists that renders the Emergency Department unsafe. Examples include fire, explosion, bomb threat, gunfire, nuclear/biological/chemical incidents, etc.

NO patients shall be transported to facilities that are reported as in "Condition Black".

Use of Condition Black is reportable to the Pennsylvania Department of Health under Section 313(g) of the Medical Care Availability and Reduction of Error (MCARE) Act (act) (40 P. S. § 1303.313(g)) as interpreted by the Department of Health.