Training Initiatives to Improve EMS System

Michelle Johnston
Training and Base Hospital Coordinator

Michelle Johnston, Training and Base Hospital Coordinator, wants all EMTs and paramedics to have the best foundation possible.

Johnston oversees all aspects of EMS training and Scope of Practice. This involves a variety of new initiatives, including e-learning, computerized testing, and auditing practical exams. “It’s all part of an effort to bring consistency to the field,” Johnston said.

Johnston recently helped to develop an e-learning site for training. During the next several months, she will populate the system, with e-classes expected to launch in October 2006.

“We can design appropriate training for the field, since this system is easily adaptable,” Johnston said.

The e-learning website will provide on-line continuing education for all levels of EMTs. Consistency, ease of access, and low to no cost to EMS professionals are among the reasons the Bureau is pursuing the e-learning site.

Another aspect of EMS education is National Registry testing, which will be administered electronically nationwide beginning in January 2007.

Over the past several months, the Bureau has worked with the National Registry of EMTs and computer-based testing company PearsonVUE to select seven sites in Arizona. When implemented, the electronic system will replace the old paper exam and will ensure that most Arizona EMT candidates will drive less than 100 miles to take the test on the new computerized system.

In addition to convenience, computerized testing will provide a more accurate picture of EMTs’ skills by evaluating each answer given during the test. Computer adaptive testing allows highly skilled individuals to answer fewer questions, shortening test times. A final benefit of electronic testing is that results are normally available on-line the next business day after the test is taken.

These streamlined training initiatives will allow Johnston and BEMS staff to spend more time in the field auditing practical exams, a task the Bureau has not undertaken in a number of years. Just as practical exams are designed to test an EMT’s ability to perform under pressure, practical exam audits will test a training program’s success in teaching critical hands-on skills. Johnston said, “We really want to step up the emphasis on quality training, because ultimately, everyone’s concern is the well-being of the patient in the field.”

Johnston has been traveling throughout the state presenting the new BEMS training initiatives to regional EMS Councils. Also as the Scope of Practice point person, Johnston works with the Bureau’s two Regional Liaisons to ensure all Scope of Practice questions are answered in a timely, consistent manner.

Johnston attributes her ability to balance life on the road with a heavy in-office schedule to growing up in a military family. An Air Force Reserve EMT herself, Johnston acknowledges she’ll face many challenges in the coming months, but looks forward to the opportunity to build strong, supportive relationships with people in EMS training programs statewide.

Employee Profile — Harry Eth

Anyone who has applied for, or changed, an ambulance Certificate of Necessity (CON) during the past four years has spoken with Harry Eth, the Bureau’s CON Manager. Eth works with ambulance services to ensure all the legal details of their CON are correct.

When Eth first arrived at the Bureau eight years ago, his primary responsibility was to audit ambulance services’ CON performance. His current role provides more variety and challenge. “I might work with a provider on something as simple as submitting a name change, or something much more complex, requiring a hearing before an administrative law judge,” Eth said. “It’s about guiding ambulance companies through the process.”

Armed with maps, computerized mapping software, and countless binders of legal documents, Eth demonstrates the patience and tenacity needed to work through each lengthy case. His background in accounting, and 23 years with ADHS.

Outside the office, activity and adventure are important factors in Eth’s life. An avid snow skier, he revels in the photos he’s captured of snow-capped peaks, including pictures from Telluride, Colorado where he’ll vacation again this winter. In addition to skiing, Eth enjoys weight-lifting and exploring new places.
ADHS Forming Prehospital Drugs Rulemaking Task Force

ADHS is forming a Prehospital Drugs Rulemaking Task Force to acquire input on its Rulemaking on Control, Use, and Availability of Drugs in the Prehospital EMS Setting (“Prehospital Drugs Rulemaking”). In this rulemaking, ADHS intends to:

- Clarify EMT authorization to administer, monitor, and assist with patient self-administration of drugs;
- Establish minimum documentation requirements related to prehospital drugs;
- Establish minimum supply levels for drugs to which an EMT must have access while performing as an EMT for an EMS provider; and
- Establish clear administrative medical director responsibilities related to supervision of an EMS provider’s prehospital drugs, including standard operating procedure and compliance audit requirements;
- Add a requirement for a BLS ground ambulance to contain at least the minimum supply of drugs required in the EMT-B Drug List; and
- Review the requirement for temperature control of drugs in a ground ambulance.

The first Task Force meeting will be in December 2005 or January 2006. For more information on this Task Force, please contact Gene Wikle at (602) 364-3150 or wiklee@azdhs.gov.

Cochise County Awarded Grant to Replace Radios in the Field

Earlier this year the Cochise County Fire Chief’s Association and Cochise County EMS Council submitted a grant to the Office of Domestic Preparedness for mobile and handheld radios for the participating EMS and Fire communities in that area. The total cost was estimated at $566,732.00.

A condition of the grant proposal was that the participating providers fund a five percent margin to replace many of the old and outdated radio systems within the fire departments. 20 fire and EMS agencies agreed to participate and supported the proposal. The end product of their efforts was a federal grant award in the amount of $666,272. The providers where then required to raise the remaining five percent of the funds. As a result, 455 hand held radios and 255 mobile radios will be in place before the end of the year. That same group is now working to program and support the proposal. Bill Miller, Fire Chief for Fry Fire Department and Vice Chair for SAEMS (Southern Arizona Emergency Medical Systems) said, “I believe that we’re the first county in Arizona to work with all fire and EMS agencies (both private and tax based organizations) to complete an interoperable communications system within a county.”

Quick Beats

Bureau of EMS News in Brief

ADHS Adopts 13 New Documents Effective November 1, 2005

Consistent with the September 2005 recommendations of the Protocols, Medications, and Devices Committee and the October 2005 recommendations of the Medical Direction Commission and Emergency Medical Services Council, ADHS adopted the following 13 documents, effective November 1, 2005:

- GD-081-PHS-EMS: Recommendations for EMT-B Use of an Esophageal Tracheal Double Lumen Airway Device (ETDLAD)
- GD-080-PHS-EMS: Drug Profile for Vasopressin
- GD-070-PHS-EMS through GD-079-PHS-EMS: Pediatric Triage and Treatment Protocols

A.A.C. R9-25-511 expands the EMT-B Scope of Practice to include use of an ETDLAD (more commonly referred to by the proprietary name Combitube®) as an optional skill that is acquired through prescribed training and that requires medical direction. GD-081-PHS-EMS provides ADHS’s recommendations for EMT-B use of an ETDLAD and is intended to be a guideline for the training prescribed under A.A.C. R9-25-511(C). A.A.C. R9-25-511 is available on the ADHS website at www.azdhs.gov/ems/new.htm.


If you have any questions about these documents, please contact Gene Wikle at wiklee@azdhs.gov or (602) 364-3150.

New Substantive Policy Statement on R9-25-407

Adopted December 1, 2005

Effective December 1, 2005, ADHS is adopting a new substantive policy statement to provide ADHS’s interpretation of the language “authorized federal or state emergency response deployment” in R9-25-407. R9-25-407 authorizes ADHS to grant an extension of time to file for recertification to an EMT who applies as required under R9-25-407(A) if the EMT is unable to meet the recertification requirements in R9-25-406 because of, among other things, “authorized federal or state emergency response deployment.”


Air Ambulance Rulemakings on GRRC Agenda for February 2006

ADHS has filed two Notices of Final Rulemaking related to air ambulance rules with the Governor’s Regulatory Review Council (GRRC). The first rulemaking would repeal the outdated ambulance service license, ambulance registration certificate, and miscellaneous rules in 9 A.A.C. 13, Articles 10-12. The second rulemaking would adopt new rules for air ambulance service licensure and air ambulance registration in 9 A.A.C. 25, Articles 7 and 8 and would add time-frames for air ambulance service licensure in 9 A.A.C. 25, Article 12.

The air ambulance rulemakings will be considered for approval by GRRC at its meeting on February 7, 2006, at 9:00 a.m. GRRC agendas and information on the GRRC meeting location are available at: www.grrc.state.az.us/.

ADHS began working on the air ambulance rulemakings with the Air Ambulance Rulemaking Task Force in December 2004. The public comment period for the proposed rulemakings was from September 30 to November 18, 2005. During the public comment period, comments ADHS received were supportive of the rulemakings.

For more information on these rulemakings, please contact either:

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Answer to EMS Question of the Month

An EMT must successfully complete and pass either an EMT-B Refresher or Refresher Challenge examination, or have current NREMT-Basic registration.

EMT-Is and EMT-Ps must successfully complete 60 hours of continuing education, of which no more the 48 clock hours can come from an ALS refresher course. Alternatively, EMT-Is and EMT-Ps must successfully maintain NREMT registration for the appropriate certification level.

For additional information regarding re-certification requirements, refer to Arizona Administrative Code, R9-25-406.

Note to All EMTs

As a certified EMT in Arizona, it is your responsibility to complete the required training courses in order to maintain your certification. Furthermore it is your responsibility, not your training instructor’s or employer’s, to submit required application materials to the Bureau.