
2007 BUDGET BRIEFING NOTE

Hospital Offload Delay

Issue:

A key issue facing Toronto EMS continues to be the hospital offload delay, as over the past several years, EMS paramedics have been requested to continue caring for ambulance patients after their initial arrival to the hospital.

Background:

Over the past several years, it has become practice for hospital emergency department staff to request Toronto EMS paramedics to continue caring for ambulance patients for extended periods after their initial arrival to the hospital.

Hospital Offload delays adversely impact unit availability and Toronto EMS' ability to respond to emergencies in the community.

Further to response issues, it is routine for paramedics to be forced to stay as much as two hours past the end of their 12-hour shift which not only puts pressure on EMS' over time budget but also contributes to the loss of staff productive hours.

Key Points:

- Hospital Offload delays have resulted in available ambulance resources being depleted and impacts EMS response to emergency calls in the City. This has been a principal factor in the degradation of EMS response time from nearly 84% within 9 minutes in 1996 to only 68.1% within 9 minutes currently.
- In order to protect response times to the community, Toronto EMS considers it unacceptable to have fewer than 20 ambulances available to respond to calls. An analysis of a two-month snapshot (July 15 to September 14, 2006) identified the following:

Number of hours during which ambulance availability dropped to unacceptable levels July 15 - September 14, 2006			
20 OR Fewer Available Units	10 OR Fewer Available Units	5 OR Fewer Available Units	NO available units
744	193	41	1

- Increase in time required to service a call. Call service time (primarily impacted by hospital offload delays) has been steadily increasing over the past several years. Call service time in 2001 was 118 minutes and in 2006 was 158 minutes at the 90th percentile. Average in hospital times in 2000 were 35 minutes versus an average of 63 minutes in 2006.
- Because of offload delay, Paramedics regularly stay past their 12-hour shift which has resulted in over expenditures in overtime (\$3,906,700 in 2006) which presents a major challenge for EMS. While EMS has so far absorbed most of the over expenditure (\$3,587,600 in 2006) through gapping and other non-salary cost containment measures, these containment measures have further contributed to the degradation of EMS' response time.
- EMS will continue to work aggressively with key stakeholders in the reduction of the impact of hospital offload delay. The Schwartz Report, entitled "Improving Access to Emergency Services: A System Commitment" has been accepted by the Minister of Health and Long Term Care and is currently in the hands of the Implementation Team. As recommendations are implemented, it is expected that the solutions will lead to a reduction in Offload Delay, however short-term relief will be minimal.

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