

FACT SHEET
Denver Health
Paramedic Division Quality Improvement

May 2008

Denver Health Paramedics are committed to providing the best advanced life-saving care possible in a pre-hospital setting. They take their charge as the medical professionals ready for any emergency seriously, and are committed to the quality improvement process thereby ensuring high quality care for all.

Over the last five years, Denver Health Paramedics have conducted site visits with several EMS response teams across the country, to review their best practices and incorporate the best ones in order to enhance an already high performing emergency response system for the citizens of Denver. Boston; Indianapolis; Kansas City; Cleveland; Hennepin County Minnesota; Johnson County Kansas; Atlanta; Honolulu; Charlotte, North Carolina; Raleigh/Durham, North Carolina; and Dallas/Ft. Worth, were the cities studied.

As part of the two-tiered response system used in the City and County of Denver, the Denver Health Paramedic Division has a close working relationship with the Denver Fire Department. The Denver Fire Department Captain assigned to Emergency Medical Services, the Medical Director for the Denver Fire Department and the Denver Paramedic Division, and the Chief of the Denver Health Paramedic Division hold weekly meetings to discuss mutual issues. There are also quarterly meetings with the Denver Fire Department and the Denver Health Paramedic Division command staff; monthly firehouse visits by Dr. Chris Colwell, M.D., medical director for the Denver Fire Department and the Denver Paramedics; and shared presentations by Denver Fire and Denver Paramedics at each other's training academies.

Denver Health Paramedic Division Captains, who are also highly skilled paramedics, are stationed throughout the City and County of Denver 24/7 to aid in multiple casualty situations as well as to provide immediate representation should concerns arise from patients and/or family members. These Captains are also available to answer questions from other paramedics, firefighters and EMT-Basics in the field, and provide coaching and instruction when necessary.

The Denver Health Paramedic School offers diversity training classes to ensure that paramedics are providing culturally competent health care. All new paramedics are required to take this course. In addition, all paramedics are required to take an online diversity refresher course every year as part of the annual review process.

Every new Paramedic and EMT-Basic must undergo a rigorous field training program of at least six months. Physician leadership and training is a major component of the field training program. This program has helped reduce the turnover rate in new hires to the Division, with a 93 percent retention rate among these new hires.

Denver Health Paramedics provide business cards to every patient and family member during transport. This allows for patients and public to know who is caring for them so they can comment on the excellent care they received or send in a complaint, should they feel it is warranted.

All patient, citizen, health care provider, paramedic, firefighter, dispatcher complaints are forwarded to the Chief Paramedic for immediate resolution.

An additional basic life support (BLS) ambulance was added to the Paramedic Division's street fleet in January 2006 to relieve the demand on advanced life support ambulances. BLS ambulances respond to non-emergency situations such as intoxication transports and other non-life threatening calls.

All Paramedic Division dispatchers are trained in Emergency Medicine Dispatch, which provides consistency in call response through standardization.

Post locations – where ambulances are stationed throughout the city – are modified based on call population/density, traffic patterns and proximity to 911 participating hospitals.

A recent change in shift start times was implemented to increase the number of ambulances on the streets in the mornings when call volumes are highest. In addition, altering the start times of two evening shift ambulances allows for increased coverage during peak call times.

In 2007, the Denver Health Paramedic Division work force was composed of 17 percent minorities and 32 percent women. As a comparison, in 2005, the Division's work force was only 9.9 percent minority; and in 2006 it was 13.1 percent minority. In addition, the Division promoted its first female the rank of Lieutenant.