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Case Study: A 15-Year Public/Private Partnership Goes the Distance
AMR AND THE CITY OF ARLINGTON

Synergy and spirit drive to improve healthcare

Partnerships these days tend to come and go. But in Arlington, Texas, there is a nearly 15-year cohesive, productive business relationship between the City of Arlington Fire Department and American Medical Response (AMR) that is everything a partnership should be.

The two entities teamed up in 2001 when AMR became the EMS contracted provider for the City of Arlington. Together, the two comprise the Arlington EMS System.
Approximately 140 AMR employees, including caregivers, EMTs, paramedics and dispatchers serve the City of Arlington. That number also includes representatives from AMR support services, administration, pre-billing, supervisory and management, fleet, HR, and clinical and education departments.

The process begins when 911 calls go directly to the City of Arlington “city call take” communications staff members, who then determine the need, assign priority and route calls for dispatch accordingly. AMR then sends its closest ambulance.

AMR and the City of Arlington Fire Department respond jointly to high-priority calls, with AMR typically guiding patient care and fire routinely leading scene control and security. “While we do have our usual roles, we work together on all facets of response,” said Shane Smith, AMR general manager.

AMR paramedics also support fire personnel as they are fighting fires, setting up rehabilitation stations in case any firefighters are injured in the line of duty. To further ensure smooth working relationships between the paramedics and firefighters, all ongoing continuing education training is conducted jointly and under the guidance of Cynthia Simmons, MD, medical director for the Arlington EMS System. Classes are delivered simultaneously to all groups, paramedics, EMTs and firefighters.

“We train on the same protocols so that when we get to a scene we don’t have to look at each other and say, ‘How do we handle this?’ said Smith. “We already know the answer because we’ve trained on it and prepared for it together.”

For David Stapp, BS, CPM, Battalion Chief, Medical Operations, Fire Department, City of Arlington, the bottom-line benefit of entrusting AMR with Arlington’s EMS services is a huge consideration.

“It keeps the cost of ambulance service down for our citizens because it’s a fee-for-service system, so only those who use the ambulance pay for it,” he said. “But beyond that, it’s the mutual understanding and open, honest dialogue between our two organizations that makes this work.”

Strong bonds exist at all levels between the two entities, from administration and support to the firefighters and paramedics. “This public/private partnership works for a variety of reasons,” said Smith. “Our staffs work well together. A saying that we use a fair bit is that we try to stay in our lanes. We understand each other’s area of focus, and if AMR arrives on scene and the situation is more so in the fire department’s lane, then we’re there to support them in whatever they need to accomplish, and vice versa.”
“We understand each other, and we’re on scene working in the best interests of our patients and customers together,” Smith continues. “Everyone understands what the goals are. And there’s a spirit among this group that when we work together, we provide our patients and community the best care and experience we can possibly provide.”

MOBILE INTEGRATED HEALTHCARE

Improving the health of an entire population sometimes means reaching one patient at a time, particularly those patients whose circumstances prevent them from being able to easily access healthcare. AMR and the City of Arlington are piloting a Mobile Integrated Healthcare program targeted toward previously identified “frequent utilizers” of 911 services, with the ultimate goal of getting patients the care they need when they need it.

Patients often don’t want to call 911, but limited healthcare options leave them little choice. “The emergency department is designed to treat emergent conditions, when oftentimes these patients merely need a medication adjustment or something similar,” said Chief Stapp.
“They just need to be connected to someone who can make those types of changes. With this program, we’re the connectivity and the home resource. We come into the patient’s home, check on them, perform any necessary lab tests and evaluate their needs,” Chief Stapp continued.

To begin the pilot program, AMR and the City of Arlington identified 20 to 30 frequent utilizers of the 911 system and gauged their level of interest in participating in the preemptive care program. In collaboration, paramedics from both AMR and the City of Arlington visit participants three times weekly to check in and perform necessary services.

“Both AMR and City of Arlington Fire Department representatives are taking care of different pieces of the process and then coming together during weekly case reviews to share how things are going and what each person has seen and learned,” said Chief Stapp. “We’re very much still in the learning phase of this. But we have every confidence that it will be successful.”

AMR’s Smith shares that confidence. “Mobile Integrated Healthcare is an important topic in EMS today and one where we can definitely add value for the City of Arlington and benefit the community,” he said.

Two local hospitals have expressed interest in joining the program. “Hospitals could identify certain patient populations for which our services would be beneficial,” said Chief Stapp. “Hospital readmissions and the number-one most costly and most-often readmitted patient — the congestive heart failure patient — is a great example. If hospitals could identify and allow us to help those patients outside the hospital, thus reducing readmissions, that would keep patients healthier and help reduce healthcare costs for everyone.”
AMR AND THE ARLINGTON FIRE DEPARTMENT

Public/private partnership results in high-quality care.

CARING FOR FANS AND BEYOND

AMR also contracts with the City of Arlington for special event operations at Arlington’s professional sports stadiums, including the Texas Rangers ballpark and the home stadium for the Dallas Cowboys. Services include ambulance stand-by services for guests, fans and players; staffing first-aid rooms, on-foot venue response teams and physician coverage through AMR’s sister company, EmCare, the country’s largest physician services organization.

“We work cooperatively in the stadium with the Arlington Fire Department, just as we work cooperatively within all aspects of the EMS system,” said Smith. That includes joint event planning and deployment pre-planning with city and fire officials and stadium personnel for events that require one paramedic or 50 paramedics.

“It’s a very busy venue for us, and we’re typically out there several days a week with the Arlington Fire Department making sure that the guests who visit the venue have a great experience,” said Smith. “We’re combining our services with the fire department to ensure that Arlington is a safe place to visit and one where people enjoy being.”

A PARTNERSHIP THAT PROMOTES A SAFER, HEALTHIER ARLINGTON

AMR is a dedicated partner to the City of Arlington and for the past 15 years has been working to improve the health and well-being of its citizens. Working hand-in-hand, AMR and the Arlington Fire Department respond to more than 45,000 EMS calls a year, provide Mobile Integrated Healthcare services for residents and ensure that millions of fans have a safe experience at two professional sports stadiums. The secret to that success is the public/private partnership that utilizes the best of both the Arlington Fire Department and AMR to provide service excellence, outstanding leadership and above all, high-quality medical care.

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