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WARDS Deadline Fast Approaching

April 1, 2006 – The Wisconsin Ambulance Run Data System (WARDS) goes on-line to receive patient care data from the state's ambulance providers.

April 1, 2007 – WARDS deadline approaching. All services must be compliant with data uploads or using the web-based report system by January 1, 2008.

Today – The deadline is fast approaching and many services are scrambling to find the resources to become compliant with the data request from the state EMS office.

I have been receiving many requests recently for information on “that software thing” the state wants us to buy. In addition, there have been urgent requests from service directors scrambling to get funds together to make the compliance date. I believe that taking some time to discuss the Wisconsin Ambulance Run Data System in an effort to help clear some of the common misconceptions will help.

In the late 1990s, the state EMS office rolled out a data project called WEMSIS – Wisconsin EMS Information System. This was a Microsoft Access database that services were asked to use to electronically collect run information. It was a joint project between the DOT and the state EMS office to start to collect EMS information for injury prevention and quality assurance purposes. In 1999-2000, the system was scrapped because of many issues, and for a time, an EMS data system dropped off the map.

In late 2004, the EMS Advisory board and the state EMS office, in response to the national trend for EMS data, brought the subject back to the table. A committee was formed and the requirements for a system were developed. On the recommendations of the board, a request for proposal was issued and in late 2005, a data system was purchased from the Minnesota-based ImageTrend. Throughout the process, the overwhelming message needing to be relayed was “we did not want another WEMSIS.”

It was the desire of all involved to assure an overwhelming success of this new data

project. This system needed to be cost-effective with value added. An important feature was having the system web-based and accessible from anywhere there is a computer with an Internet connection. Making the system virtually free was vital to this objective. The next concern was to give services resources to help operate more efficiently and in the best interest of the patients. WARDS meets these critical concerns and will be a valuable tool for every service.

It is because of this focus that this has been one of the highest priority projects for our office. The National EMS Information system (NEMSIS) has been knocking on our door for information since we went live in April 2006. The ability to show what services are doing and what kinds of patients we treat is critical to helping develop an effective EMS system in the state, as well as a national model.

So this brings me to the focus of this article: Where are we and what do we need to do? Currently we have about 41% of all services submitting data to the system. There are approximately 41,000 runs that have been submitted. This is a great start to a system that has gradually been increasing in daily use. The state office has held 12 different trainings around the state in the last six months and we are doing everything we can to get the word out that the compliance deadline is approaching. It is important to recognize that first responder services are not required to submit data – only ambulance services at the basic level and above.

If you are a field provider, we are asking that you speak to your management and see where they are in the process. There are three common ways to comply with the system. The first is to use the web interface from either the hospital or ambulance station. An EMT would complete the entire patient care report (PCR) through the web-based system. This is the “free” way of using WARDS.

The second method would be for the service to purchase laptops and field data software. This would allow the crew to complete the

PCR on the way back from the call. When they get back to the station and complete the run, they can connect to the Internet and upload the information. This will cost you approximately \$5,000 per squad, with a recurring software fee of \$400 per year.

The final way to comply is if your company already has a software solution. Most of the software vendors are already working on a way to transmit data from their software to ours. Other proprietary and custom vendors are having some difficulties in complying with our requests. This has caused them to charge services in the state some very unreasonable costs to comply with our request.

It is with these difficulties in mind that we are making the following available: If a service is finding a significant burden in meeting the deadline of January 1, 2008, they must make this known to our office. In a letter, identify the issues and the plan to overcome the problems. As long as the service is making a reasonable effort to keep us informed of their progress, we will make the appropriate accommodations by extending the deadline. This approval will be on a case-by-case basis.

Any service that needs to get setup should contact Norah Stofflet by e-mail to request a login and access to setup their service. Her e-mail is stoffnj@dhfs.state.wi. These requests must be made by the service director and only by e-mail. We will process these requests as timely as possible. You may also find additional information on our website at www.dhfs.wi.gov/EMS.

I cannot emphasize how important this is to the future of EMS in Wisconsin. With a properly functioning data system, we can help our services improve patient care and operational efficiencies. In addition, we can have the data to back up requests for money to help improve services, coverage, and the EMS system in Wisconsin. If there is one segment of the EMS community that compliance is vital, it would be the volunteer services in rural areas. This data is crucial to getting resources to where they are needed and ultimately service the most important person in the chain, the patient. ♻️