The job of emergency medical services (EMS) has expanded greatly in recent years, and that evolution is set to continue. EMS agencies first developed as part of public safety. Serving as first responders, paramedics’ role was to stabilize the patient and provide transportation to a hospital, where nurses and physicians would take over.

Today, however, paramedics deliver a much wider range of services, and EMS is an essential factor in the healthcare equation. To support their expanded role, EMS agencies need new, more integrated IT capabilities.

Challenges for EMS Agencies
Not only is the role of EMS growing in size, complexity and importance to patient health, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) indirectly puts greater pressure on EMS agencies to accomplish more and improve performance.

Paramedics don’t simply rush patients to hospitals. Called to the scene of an emergency, a paramedic might use a cardiac defibrillator to restart someone’s heart, insert airway tubes or intravenous lines, or administer pain medications. The quality of this work is crucial: Research indicates that the actions of paramedics significantly impact the patient’s chances of survival. Paramedics must have all the information required to make the right decisions and deliver the best possible care.

Besides providing higher levels of care, paramedics often handle problems that are not emergencies in the traditional sense. Decades spent training the public to call 911 for help have paid off well — perhaps too well. As a result, citizens often turn to emergency call centers with issues that belong to social services agencies. When a call comes in, paramedics might arrive on the scene only to find a citizen who doesn’t have a primary care physician and is worried about a cough.
that won’t go away. Paramedics help these citizens as best they can, but such calls put extra stress on already-strained agency resources. If EMS agencies are going to continue to respond to these calls, they must be able to track and manage the costs.

Many leaders in the EMS community believe agencies should move beyond the original emergency transportation role. In some communities, paramedics provide healthcare services in patients’ homes — for example, conducting follow-up visits with patients who were recently discharged from hospitals. In other areas, paramedics play a crucial role in community medicine, helping citizens monitor their blood sugar or reminding parents to update their children’s immunizations.

As EMS agencies take on these expanded roles, healthcare reimbursement models are shifting from pay-for-service to pay-for-performance. With this transition, EMS agencies must track and document the costs of all the services they provide and the outcomes those services produce. They must also increase their visibility to ensure the healthcare community regards them as vital partners in delivering quality care to patients.

Another challenge EMS agencies face stems from being ill-equipped to manage costs and improve patient outcomes. Even when leaders understand their agencies must change, they often lack data to analyze their operations and find

**EMS CHALLENGES: A CLOSER LOOK**

Although they play an important role in healthcare, EMS agencies face many obstacles as they work to fulfill their missions, including:

**Not enough information**

Paramedics see patients briefly and when they are in no condition to provide complete, accurate medical histories. Unlike hospital staff, paramedics don’t have access to health information exchanges, which makes it difficult to collect details on crucial factors such as recent medical treatments, medications and allergies.

**Lack of communication**

Paramedics don’t have a simple, foolproof way to give hospitals a complete picture of the services they administer to patients. Without that information, hospitals cannot provide a seamless transition from ambulance to emergency room. To make sure patients get the care they need, while eliminating the extra costs that arise from redundant procedures, EMS agencies and hospitals must communicate and collaborate effectively.

**Low priority for reimbursement**

Under the ACA, new Affordable Care Organizations (ACOs) are responsible for distributing payments for services to patients covered by Medicare or Medicaid. These ACOs are usually led by hospitals or physician groups. Because EMS agencies are often not viewed as part of the healthcare equation, they could be last to receive reimbursements if and when the new model comes to include EMS. If they can’t tighten their bonds with hospitals, EMS agencies could see their revenues fall significantly — even as communities call on them to provide more services.
opportunities to improve. That data resides in numerous, disparate systems that don’t share information. While under pressure to become more efficient and effective, EMS agencies lack the business intelligence resources to keep pace with demand.

A New Solution for EMS

EMS agencies are facing unprecedented demands. To deliver excellent patient care, these agencies need to support their operations with a fully integrated IT platform, which is the only way to ensure the right information reaches the appropriate decision-makers. Infor is ready to provide that solution.

Infor delivers complete solutions to traditional healthcare organizations. Infor’s Healthcare Integration Suite allows organizations to manage their interfaces in one place and combine and share data, regardless of the message format or transmission protocol. Physicians, hospitals, health plans, health information exchanges, medical device manufacturers and patients use Infor tools to exchange information electronically, with full confidence the data will remain secure.

Many of the leading healthcare systems in the U.S. rely on Infor’s Healthcare Integration platform for the secure exchange of data. Now, Infor is offering these capabilities to EMS agencies as well.

Public safety agencies recognize Infor as a leading computer-aided dispatch (CAD) provider. Customers using Infor’s EnRoute integrated dispatching and mapping system include: the city of Hialeah, Fla.; Lake County, Ill.; Stafford County, Va.; the Illinois State Toll Highway Authority; and American Medical Response, the leading medical transport company in the United States.

Infor’s experience in emergency services puts it in an excellent position to help EMS agencies fulfill their important role in the healthcare equation.

Infor’s integrated system for EMS will fulfill two important needs.

1. It provides a platform for managing patient information and exchanging data with hospitals.

These capabilities extend the functions Infor provides to traditional healthcare organizations.

EMS agencies using Infor’s platform will become full participants in health information exchanges. For example, when paramedics respond to an emergency, they gain immediate access to vital medical information. Paramedics can access data such as recent hospitalizations, chronic ailments, current medications and any allergies that could influence patient care. This information helps paramedics make better decisions about how to treat patients.

Additionally, any information paramedics record is instantly available to other professionals caring for the patient.

Beyond helping paramedics deliver better care during emergencies, the improved communications an integrated healthcare solution provides enables them to practice mobile integrated healthcare programs, which can help reduce repeat visits to hospitals.

Under the ACA, if a patient is re-admitted to a hospital within 30 days of discharge for the same health issue, the hospital will suffer a penalty. In addition, Medicare and Medicaid will not pay for those repeat visits. If a patient discharged from one facility receives treatment within 30 days for the same problem at a different facility, that second facility — whether a hospital or an EMS provider — will lose payment as well. In the face of this provision, both hospitals and EMS agencies have a strong incentive to collaborate and prevent patients from returning to the hospital unnecessarily.

Paramedics practicing mobile integrated healthcare reduces hospital re-admissions. For example, after a patient is treated for congestive heart failure and released, paramedics armed with a complete medical history — available through an integrated healthcare system — might visit the patient at home to ensure he or she is following the doctor’s instructions and taking medication correctly. As this practice produces better health outcomes, hospitals, EMS agencies and patients all benefit.

2. The solution gives EMS agencies a unified view of their operations.

Infor’s integrated healthcare platform for EMS brings together data drawn from disparate systems, including 911 dispatching, patient records, social services organizations and billing records, to build a complete patient profile. It also provides tools for analyzing aggregated data, helping agencies gain insights about their operations to support better decisions for the patient’s health and overall welfare.

For example, agency leaders can use these tools to determine what they spent to treat a particular patient, and how well that patient fared. By making comparisons across large numbers of patients, they can discover

“EMS leaders understand that transitioning from managing isolated data points to gaining insight from integrated information systems is key to playing a larger role in healthcare. It lets EMS demonstrate its downstream value to patients, politicians and payers.”

— JAY FITCH, PH.D., EMS/PUBLIC SAFETY CONSULTANT
which practices worked best. Decision-makers can also determine the overall cost of running the EMS organization and what factors contributed to that total, and identify the best opportunities to improve patient care while lowering costs.

MedStar, the EMS and mobile integrated healthcare provider for Fort Worth, Texas, and 14 neighboring cities, is using the Infor Cloverleaf Integration Suite to share information with physicians and hospitals efficiently, helping emergency clinicians quickly assess and treat patients while maintaining HIPAA compliance.

“Infor truly shares our vision for providing efficient, reliable and cost-effective emergency medical services to the community,” says Doug Hooten, MedStar executive director. “With Infor Cloverleaf, we’re now able to quickly and accurately convey patient information to and from physicians and other care providers as we all coordinate care for our patients in and out of the hospital. This not only creates the potential for boosting the efficiency of the medical treatment and helps save lives, but also adds value for MedStar’s healthcare partners as we help lead the transformation to ‘EMS version 3.0.’”

— DOUG HOOTEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MEDSTAR

Patients receive better care. Because each professional who helps a patient has a complete picture of their medical history, patients receive seamless care, with no redundant treatments or tests and no omissions. Also, EMS agencies gain the ability to deliver a broad range of services to local communities, making medical treatments and preventive care available to citizens who could not easily access services previously, which improves communities’ overall health.

EMS agencies improve their future. Thanks to the new capabilities gained through health integration technology, EMS agencies can become full participants in the healthcare equation and be reimbursed accordingly. Agencies also gain a complete picture of their overall costs and performance. These insights can help agencies fine-tune their operations to accomplish more and perform more effectively within the constraints of today’s tight budgets.

The Next Step
To join the discussion on the new role of EMS and the promise of fully integrated healthcare delivery, contact kurt.steward@infor.com.

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