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**MEDICAL HEALTH SERVICES  
EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES**

DECEMBER 26, 2020

**TO:** EMERGENCY RECEIVING CENTER (ERC) HOSPITALS  
AMBULANCE PROVIDERS  
911 PARAMEDIC PROVIDERS  
HOSPITAL CEOs  
BASE HOSPITAL COORDINATORS

**FROM:** CARL H. SCHULTZ, MD  
EMS MEDICAL DIRECTOR  
ORANGE COUNTY HEALTH CARE AGENCY

CAS

**SUBJECT: AMBULANCE OFFLOADING OF BLS PATIENTS TO EMERGENCY  
DEPARTMENT WAITING ROOMS AND RESTARTING DIVERSION**

Ambulances that transport BLS patients to hospitals that have been waiting more than 60 minutes "on the wall" may now off-load these patients to the waiting room under specific conditions. This directive is necessary as delays in off-loading ambulance patients at Orange County emergency receiving centers is now becoming very serious. So many ambulances are being held at hospital emergency departments that Orange County EMS risks receiving calls asking for guidance as paramedics are not able to obtain ambulances to transport patients who have called 911. A BLS patient may be placed in a hospital ED waiting room after notifying the triage nurse if **ALL** of the following conditions are met:

- Patient held by the ambulance crew for at least 60 minutes inside the ED or outside the ambulance in another structure (tent, on a tarp, etc)
- Patient  $\geq 18$  years of age or pediatric patient accompanied by adult
- Normal mental status with decision-making capacity and GCS = 15
- Ambulatory without difficulty and without assistance (as appropriate for age)
- Not on a psychiatric hold (5150) or suicidal
- No chest pain, syncope, or acute neurologic symptoms (examples include no focal weakness, slurred speech, dizziness/vertigo)
- Normal vital signs for adults
  - SBP  $\geq 100$
  - RR between 12 and 20
  - HR between 60 and 100
  - Pulse oximetry  $\geq 94\%$  on room air
  - For pediatric patients, normal vital signs per age

**Restart Diversion and Waiting Room Off-Load**

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After waiting 60 minutes outside the ambulance (on the wall) with BLS patients meeting these criteria, EMS personnel may initiate this directive by first contacting the triage nurse and informing this individual that the wait time has exceeded 60 minutes. If told that they must remain, EMS personnel will then provide a patient report and place the patient in the waiting room. Before leaving, EMS personnel will document in the PCR: 1) all the criteria the patient met for off-loading in the waiting room; 2) time of transfer; and 3) the name of the person to whom report was given. Obtaining the signature of the triage nurse is desirable but not necessary. If the triage nurse declines report, place the patient in the waiting room and document refusal of report and/or signature in the PCR.

In addition, OCEMS will re-authorize the use of ambulance diversion. The EMS system for Orange County has now recorded 90% APOTs of less than 50 minutes for the last 3 consecutive days. As previously stated, this means emergency departments throughout the county will once again be able to initiate diversion effective at 7 PM (1900 hours) tonight, December 26, 2020. The ability to go on diversion will remain in effect until one of the following benchmarks is reached:

- 90% APOT exceeds 50 minutes in a 24 hour period (will retain discretion to extend period a bit longer if seems appropriate)
- The number of hospitals on diversion equals 15 at any time
- The number of total diversion hours equals 200 for a 24 hour period

OCEMS will continue to monitor the status of the EMS system and participating hospitals, and be prepared to take additional action as needed.