EMD Roles and Responsibilities

Objectives

- List/Explain 5 Functions of the EMD
- Know the attributes for a Successful Dispatcher
- Know the General Roles and Responsibility of the EMD
- List 3 phases of Dispatch Function
- Describe the EMS System

The Roles and Responsibilities of an EMD are intertwined with good telecommunicator skills and medical knowledge. While most people feel that all you have to do is answer a phone to be a telecommunicator, there are a variety of skills that need to be learned. While most agencies have a well developed training program to emphasize the proper way of answering and handling most calls. Individual departments will have slightly different protocols for a variety of call types, but there is sure to be at least one in your career that just did not or will not fit into one of the protocols. By applying good telecommunicator skills and having some medical knowledge you will be able to handle the call in an appropriate manner.

As the role of EMD has been evolving, several misconceptions have been identified. These are:

- Callers are too upset to provide accurate and useful responses to the EMD questions.
- Callers would not be able to provide the EMD with required information that is necessary to effectively dispatch emergency medical resources.
- The medical expertise required for effective emergency medical dispatch is not important, therefore public safety officials should use non-EMD dispatchers to dispatch resources.
- The EMD is too busy dispatching to worry about asking all those questions, to provide instructions or use their protocol cards.
• Medical advice (provided over the phone) cannot help patients and could actually be dangerous.

• Using the EMDPRS increases the amount of time and resources required to process a call.

As with all myths these have been dispelled. Callers are not too upset to provide accurate responses. Callers simply need to be lead into the proper questions to get good answers. The protocols are designed so that you can get the proper medical information you need to effective dispatch. This fact alone will separate the EMD from other public safety dispatchers. As we look at the subject of being ‘too busy’ to worry about asking questions, providing instruction and/or using the protocols, we all must remember “That is your job”. The job of dispatching includes the ability to ask the proper questions. The protocols list the questions for you, making your job a little easier. The protocols that are used in McHenry/Western Lake County EMS system have been reviewed and approved by our medical director, Dr. Pacini. The amount of time required to process a call with the use of protocols has actually stayed the same or in some instances has decreased. This is due to the uniformity in questioning. As the EMD evolves we need to keep up and remember that we truly are professionals.

Now that we have discussed some of the misconceptions, we can take a look at your responsibilities. An EMD receives and processes calls for emergency medical services, determine the nature and severity, coordinates and dispatches resources, and give assistance via the EMDPRS. The EMD relays pertinent information, attempts to ensure the safety of patients and bystanders, and coordinates other public safety and EMS services as required. By staying on the phone and talking with the patient, and/or caller, the dispatcher can make the difference between and controlled scene or complete panic.

Being successful at your job is not just luck. Good dispatchers all seem to have the same attributes and/or behaviors and some are learned skills. These would include:

• Helpful and compassionate.
  The dispatcher tends to be the person who truly wants to help another

• Ability to handle stressful situations
  The dispatcher needs to calm the caller and themselves in order to gather the information necessary for dispatch.
• Mastering the skills of EMD
  Dispatching skills are learned with courses and practice. No dispatcher will walk out of class fully skilled in EMD. With a little extra practice and repeated reading of the instructions, the skill level will improve.

• Effectively gather information
  A dispatcher will gather several pieces of information regarding an incident. Some information comes from the questions asked and other information will come from volunteered information given by the caller or noises heard in the background. The dispatcher then processes this information, prioritizing and consolidates it into a useful format.

• Assist responders in locating patients
• Determines nature of medical situation without diagnosing
• Reacts passively to hostile callers
• Maintains confidentiality

Now that you know what attributes make a good dispatcher, you need to remember that there are three phases of the dispatch function. The first phase is receiving the call. During this phase the dispatcher:
  • Takes the incoming call
  • Engages caller in the initial survey
  • Then goes to the proper protocol for more information.

Answering the call should always be done with the same line, 911 what is your emergency. From there the dispatcher will need to get the answers to “Where, what, how, who, when”. These questions are located under the Initial Survey tab in the protocols. Keep in mind while getting the information that the enhanced 911 information that comes in with the call should always be verified. As soon as the information has been collected the dispatcher will then turn to the appropriate instruction tab. Under the tab will be additional key questions at the top of the page.

The second phase, dispatch phase, will include:
  • Making sure you are on the correct tab
  • Protocols give appropriate response mode
  • Dispatches response personnel in proper configuration
This second phase includes making sure you are on the correct tab. Under the key questions you may be directed to an alternative tab due to the answers to some questions. An example of this would be under the “Drug Overdose” tab. If the answer to key question 3 or 4 is yes, then you are directed to the appropriate tab. The dispatch decisions section II, will give you information on priority and response order. Section II portion of the protocols are not used locally. The fire departments in this area will make the decision on lights and sirens response as dictated by their local departments. The response order is also not used locally. If an ambulance is requested then an ambulance gets dispatched. If there are response plans in the computer aided dispatch program then you will get a recommendation for units to be dispatched. Keep in mind that it is only a recommendation and the individual department commander can request a change. Each police department has their own policies on what type if any type of call the police will respond to. Some police agencies respond to every call when possible and others will only respond if requested by EMS or specific complaint types. Please review these policies for the police agencies you dispatch for.

The third phase of the dispatch function is the post-dispatch activities. This is done after the appropriate units are dispatched. In this phase the dispatcher will prepare the caller for the arrival of EMS personnel. This is when locking up of pets and unlocking the door or turning on a porch light at night, might be mentioned. It is at this point that the EMD should be giving instructions to the caller, as specified in the protocols.

Remember that if you have additional EMD’s with you that some of the responsibilities maybe shared. The dispatcher who answers the original call should stay with the caller in those situations, to prevent the re-asking of questions.

We have discussed the different roles and responsibilities of the EMD. As we have looked at the different responsibilities we can start to see how we fit into the EMS system as a whole. The system we belong to is McHenry/Western Lake County EMS. The EMS systems are defined as a coordinated arrangement of resources, including personnel, equipment and facilities, organized to respond to medical emergencies regardless of the cause. Telecommunicators are the first point of contact for someone having such an emergency. Having received specified training to prepare for Emergency Medical Dispatching, you have become a vital part of the EMS system.
Roles and Responsibilities Evaluation Tool

1. Name 3 misconceptions about EMD’s:
   • ____________________________________________
   • ____________________________________________
   • ____________________________________________

2. The EMD uses __________________________ to provide pre-arrival instructions to callers that prepare them for the responder’s arrival.

3. List 5 attributes that makes for a good EMD:
   • ____________________________________________
   • ____________________________________________
   • ____________________________________________
   • ____________________________________________
   • ____________________________________________
4. What are the three phases of the dispatch function:

• ____________________________________________________________________
• ____________________________________________________________________
• ____________________________________________________________________

5. List the 5 questions the EMD tries to answer using the interrogation procedures:

• ____________________________________________________________________
• ____________________________________________________________________
• ____________________________________________________________________
• ____________________________________________________________________
• ____________________________________________________________________