

Plant City Fire Rescue

Plant City Fire Rescue began providing BLS transport services in Hillsborough County in 2001. In 2007 our department upgraded its service and began providing ALS. As a new ALS provider in a county known for the excellent pre-hospital care provided, it quickly became obvious that one of our largest priorities was performing thorough and detailed Quality Assurance processes. Given that our department was using the State Department of Health hand-written form to document our responses, the QA activities took countless hours and left a great deal to be desired. Simply attempting to locate specific types of responses was a nearly impossible task and ultimately, under the Fire Chief's direction, it was decided that our best course of action would be to apply for a grant in order to begin performing electronic documentation.

The grant process took no longer than any other similar application and was a simple matter of citing the countless agencies that were already successfully using the electronic format. In our application we were honest and stated that we believed the paperless method of patient documentation was a superior method if for no other reason than the potential of truly being able to improve our patient outcomes via better training. After all, if you are not aware a problem exist how can you establish corrective training courses? We had read numerous accounts by other agencies nationwide that had used EMS software to determine deficiencies that were so obscure they would have otherwise gone unnoticed. We opted to point all of this potential out in our grant application because it certainly seemed to weigh in our favor that we were seeking better patient outcomes.

Some 3 months after submitting our application we received notice that we had been awarded the funds. Because we had already selected both the software and the hardware we would be putting to use it was then only a matter of contacting the vendors in order to get the items on the way. The toughest issue we faced initially was the question of a reasonable timeline that would allow us to properly train our personnel while still formally launching the program by the self-imposed deadline of October 1.

Thankfully our department is literally filled with individuals willing to step up, assist in making positive changes, and accept those changes as they come. While we certainly faced some challenges with individuals who lacked computer savvy, the fact that the hardware and the software were both so user friendly allowed us to rapidly progress through training and within one month of having received the electronic tools we were beginning to test actual response report production. In the meantime I had made application with the state for our EMSTARS access and, with a good deal of assistance from Juan and our vendor, had managed to setup everything that would be needed to truly submit our responses to the EMSTARS network. We received the computers in early July. During August we tested, trained, and prepared. And on September 1, 2008, we went "live". Our first submission to the EMSTARS network received a 100% thanks in no small part to the assistance of our vendor, Juan and the rest of the EMSTARS staff in Tallahassee, our personnel who openly accepted this change and

allowed it to succeed, and the Fire Chief who allowed me the time to perform the programming without interruption in the two weeks prior to actually beginning our testing phase.

While I would like to stand up and proudly announce how “special” or unique our department is, I honestly believe that what we accomplished could be done by literally any department in Florida that desires such a change. Since going electronic we have been fortunate to have benefited in ways we could have never predicted. Our QA process takes far less time and is far more comprehensive. Our billing processes have been streamlined which has led to an increase in revenue by about 11%. And all of our reports are clear, complete, and legible.

I have been involved in EMS since 1982. In that time I have witnessed many incredible changes that truly made EMS providers better at what we do. The addition of skills and medications, training in ICS, the use of CPAP, and power lift stretchers are but a few of the changes that come to mind. But each of the afore-mentioned changes is only able to affect a finite number of people. After all, we do not use all of our tools on each patient we encounter. But each and every patient encounter must be documented. In this day and age of computerized advances it only makes sense that EMS would want to take advantage of the technology available in order to document our activities. The tool that is the EMSTARS network is capable of changing how we interact and affect the lives of each and every patient we encounter by allowing easier access to far more information about how well we are truly performing as medical providers. From more thorough QA processes to streamlined billing that leads to more revenue (which by the way more than covered our on-going cost), the benefits our department has seen has been amazing. Information, as they say, is indeed power.

I did not intend on this article essentially becoming a sales tool for the EMSTARS network but I could not tell other providers throughout the state about our department without openly acknowledging our belief as a department in the EMSTARS network. I have little doubt that some who read this may believe that there are hidden negatives and agendas that should make every agency proceed with caution as they consider electronic options. Openly and honestly my department’s electronic experience has been nothing but a positive one and I would invite anyone who may wish to; feel free to contact me in order to ask about how we went about bringing our medical reporting method into the 21st Century.