



## Grant Monies Allow N.C. Paramedics to Make Home Visits

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*Under the program, paramedics perform a follow-up visit within a few days of a patient being discharged from hospital*

LUMBERTON - The Robeson County Board of Commissioners on Monday agreed to amend its franchise agreement with the Lumberton Rescue Squad and Emergency Medical Services so that paramedics with the entity can make home visits to Lumberton patients recently discharged from Southeastern Regional Medical Center.

The visits by the off-duty paramedics is being funded by a two-year \$310,000 grant from Duke Endowment. The grant is aimed at reducing the number of discharged patients who make a return visit to the hospital within 30 days of their discharge.

Wayne Martin, who manages the hospital's Seventh Bed Tower, said that under the Affordable Health Care Act, hospitals can be penalized monetarily if large numbers of discharged patients return to the hospital within 30 days. Last year Southeastern Regional Medical Center was penalized \$400,000, according to Robert Ivey, commander of the Lumberton Rescue Squad and EMS.

"At Southeastern the readmission rate is 27 percent," Martin said. "That's a substantial rate."

The hospital decided to seek the grant to provide follow-up home visits to discharged patients suffering from congestive heart failure, heart attacks and respiratory failure at the suggestion of the rescue squad.

Under the program, paramedics perform the follow-up visit within a few days of a patient being discharged. They look for factors that may lead to a patient's second hospital visit. They also check the patient's medication to see that it is properly being administered, as well as provide the patient with education about symptoms of their illness.

"I like to call this community medicine," said Greg Bounds, director of Robeson County's Emergency Services. "If we educate the patients, there may not be another need for them to return to the hospital."

The commissioners had to amend the county's franchise with the rescue unit because under the current franchise, paramedics can only provide services if there is a 911 dispatch. According to Bounds and Martin, Wake County is the only other local government in North Carolina that offers such a monitoring program for discharged patients.

Ivey said that about 12 paramedics will be involved in the program. The grant provides for them to be paid \$35 an hour.

Initially, the program - to begin in February - is only being offered in Lumberton.

"Our goal is to reduce the number of return hospital visits," Bounds said. "If in two years the numbers shows the program is worthwhile, it will expand throughout the entire county."

According to Martin, the paramedics will receive additional training on environmental and medical factors that may force a second visit to the hospital within 30 days.

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