

Health & Food 

## Santa Monica paramedics may soon decide if you need to go to ER

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SANTA MONICA, Calif. (KABC) -- When a paramedic responds to a call, they're required to take patients to the emergency room, even if their condition doesn't necessarily warrant that level of care. But there's a new proposal to change that in Santa Monica.

Santa Monica paramedics may soon be empowered to make medical judgments out in the field.

When 87-year-old Ada Taylor called 911, she had no idea she'd be in for a long wait. This part of a paramedic's job is called "wall time" because that's where they wait.

"It really impacts our service," said Santa Monica Fire Capt. Michael McElvaney. "We could have up to two or three, sometimes four units waiting for a bed, which depletes our resources in town."

To make things more efficient, the Santa Monica Fire Department and Santa Monica-UCLA Medical Center are taking a preliminary look at changing how residents receive care. It will be part of a pilot study called Community Emergency Medical Service.

"The concept will be basically to allow a paramedic/EMT to make a decision in the field," said Dr. Wally Ghurabi, medical director of the Emergency Center at Santa Monica-UCLA Medical Center.

Rescuers may decide a patient doesn't need an emergency room at all, maybe an urgent care or a trip to the doctor's office instead.

Whether you've bumped your head or sprained your ankle and you call 911, California law dictates that first responders take you to an emergency room. That adds to ER overcrowding.

But not everyone feels comfortable with paramedics and emergency medical technicians making that call.

"These are issues that would automatically go to ERs. We are dealing with minor stuff," said Ghurabi.

How the Santa Monica program will be implemented is still in discussions and while residents aren't completely comfortable, they'd like to see healthcare dollars being spent more responsibly.

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Dan (59792)

I was in the fire service for 32 years for a California municipal fire department and I am not aware of any California "law" in requiring ambulances to transport every patient to the emergency room. Our department ran a BLS ambulance for many years and we would routinely tell patients they did not need to go to the hospital in an ambulance. Many persons who called 911 simply do not need an ambulance ride to the emergency room. Cut fingers, broken toes, etc. do not require ambulance rides to t... [more](#)  
June 10, 2013, 4:30 PM · Reply



**C (62761)**

While there is no requirement that we HAVE to TRANSPORT a patient, there is a requirement that patients be transported to the hospital, we cannot transport to a clinic or other such means in an "emergency" even if it is utter BS.

I think the theory behind being able to transport to another facility other than an ED/ER, I think that being able to transport to places such as a 24-hour clinic will only increase the abuse of the system for transports. I believe people who might not call 911 for a no... [more](#)  
June 9, 2013, 7:30 PM · Reply



**L (74756)**

As a Paramedic of 23 years, I can definitively express that there is no such California law stating that all 911 patients must go to the hospital. There may be a departmental or regional requirement to do so. Two agencies that I have worked for encourage medics to decline transport for medically unnecessary calls (headache, ingrown toenail) If the insurance deems the transport unnecessary, they will not pay for the transport, nor should they. To clarify, the majority of these type of calls are n... [more](#)  
June 7, 2013, 1:20 AM · Reply



**Benjamin (28891)**

Here In Franklin County PA and some of the other counties use a nonemergency ambulance service for transports. Each ambulance still carries two Med Techs or a Med tech and a medic. They can still go code if the situation changes to require it. This Leaves our Ambulance corps available for emergency response. And the private ambulance company is needed for mass emergency they can be enacted.  
June 8, 2013, 5:50 PM · Reply