

REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF OTTAWA-CARLETON
MUNICIPALITÉ RÉGIONALE D'OTTAWA-CARLETON

REPORT
RAPPORT

DATE 5 Feb 99

TO/DEST. Coordinator
Community Services Committee

FROM/EXP. Director, Land Ambulance Health Services
Medical Officer of Health

SUBJECT/OBJET **RESPONSE TO INQUIRY NO. 1(99)**
ADVANCED LIFE SUPPORT PARAMEDICS

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION

That the Community Services Committee recommend Council receive this report for information.

BACKGROUND

After several requests, Land Ambulance Health Services staff have been successful in negotiating the much needed minor changes to the selection process for training Advanced Life Support Paramedics in Ottawa-Carleton.

Ministry of Health staff agreed to abandon the quota system, by service provider, and to select the best paramedics, on a region-wide basis, for Advanced Life Support training. It was also agreed that four (4) paramedics would be available to fill any vacancy, on a day's notice.

The attached report was written before Land Ambulance staff successfully negotiated these changes with the area Manager of the Ministry of Health (in partnership with the private service providers and the Base Hospital) and is in response to Councillor McGoldrick-Larsen's inquiry at the Community Services Committee meeting of 14 Jan 99.

The following was prepared in response to Community Services Committee Inquiry No. 1(99) prior to the Region of Ottawa-Carleton successfully negotiating the changes with the Ministry of Health.

1. Please explain the current Ministry of Health selection process to become an Advanced Life Support Paramedic.

- A posting is sent out by the base hospital to all ambulance services within Region of Ottawa-Carleton (ROC) announcing the pre-qualification and selection process. The announcement contains schedules of the process, course dates, an application form, a template for a curriculum vitae, a work illustration of an advanced paramedic, tips for studying and taking examinations, and general information on the content of the pre-qualifying examinations.
- An interested Paramedic I candidate submits a completed application to the base hospital office.
- Pre-qualification written examinations are arranged by the base hospital. The examinations are obtained and marked by the Ministry of Health (MOH), and a candidate must get 70 or over to pass.
- If the candidate is successful in the pre-qualification examination, the base hospital conducts an oral interview.
- The base hospital submits the results of the pre-qualification to that Paramedic's ambulance service manager (one of six in Ottawa-Carleton). Candidates require a combined mark of 70 for the pre-qualification examination and the oral interview to be considered a "pass" for the base hospital.
- Ambulance service managers then conduct oral interviews and/or written examinations, for those candidates successful in the base hospital pre-qualification process.
- Ambulance service managers select candidates and alternates for the next class based on their findings, and advise the base hospital who the selected candidates and alternates are.
- The base hospital contacts the selected and alternate candidates and provides them with a pre-course package.
- Selected and alternate candidates must then write a pre-course examination based on the material provided, and pass this examination with a minimum of 70 for admission to the training program.
- Alternates are used to replace candidates who fail the pre-course examination within each ambulance service. Use of alternates from one service to cover for a failure in another service is an exception and must be approved by the MOH.

- Alternates are only available to replace candidates who fail the pre-course examination. Alternates are not used after this specific point and time in the process because the Ministry of Health does not permit the Paramedic I candidates to have the course material (even at their own cost and if they prepare on their own time).
2. Why do classes continuously go unfilled? (every unfilled space costs about \$40,000)

Every spot that goes unfilled represents a lost opportunity cost of about \$30K to \$40K for Ottawa-Carleton. The following are the reasons why a class will proceed unfilled based on the experience to date in ROC:

- In earlier years, there were insufficient applications to the pre-qualification and selection process and/or there were insufficient successful candidates in the pre-qualification and selection process.
- Too many candidates failed the pre-course examination for admission to the training program.
- Candidates withdrew between the time he/she was approved for the training and the beginning of the training program. This is an example of where some minor modifications to the MOH's current process. For example if the MOH allowed alternates past the pre-course examination time and provided them with the instructional material to prepare through the pre-study period they could fill in on a days notice.
- A roll-out schedule for training of candidates was established by the ambulance service manager, base hospital and the Emergency Health Services branch of the MOH in early 1995 to guide managers in the selection process based on the number of advanced paramedics to be trained per service for the Ontario Pre-hospital Advanced Life Support (OPALS) project. The development of the roll-out schedule was based on guidelines established in the OPALS Consensus document to provide equitable geographic distribution of advanced paramedic services to the citizens of ROC.
- The Emergency Health Services branch of the MOH will not approve the use of alternates from one service to be used in failures or shortcomings in another service.
- Some of the six ambulance services have achieved the number of candidates to be trained based on the roll-out schedule, therefore no further candidates will be approved by the MOH for those specific services.
- Once in training a student can fail at any point in the training program, therefore reducing the number of the total to graduate. As mentioned above there are no alternates at this point in the process.
- Full time candidates must be chosen for the training program and some ambulance services began to run out of available full time candidates that were interested. It was only in the fall

of 1998 that the Ministry of Health agreed to put provisions in place to allow part-time candidates into the training program once the ambulance service had exhausted all its full time

3. Why is the pre-qualification list never used?

The pre-qualification list, in fact is not really a pre-qualification list. Because the Paramedic I candidates who pre-qualified are not given the pre course study material the option of replacing a candidate is eliminated very early in the process. In addition, pre-qualifying for a class has no carry-over rights to participate in the next class. So, while the notion of pre-qualifying candidates is a good one, the existing process eliminates all potential benefits. The other important issue is that there is no penalty for withdrawing from studies part way through the process. This is 100% paid education by the Ministry of Health.

4. How can we get some assurances that the Ministry of Health will fill the next class and that there are Paramedic I's on standby to fill in on a day's notice?

The downloading of ambulance services from the Province to Upper Tier Municipalities will drastically change the face of ambulance services in the Region of Ottawa-Carleton in the year 2000 and beyond. In less than one year the Region will have one ambulance service provider.

The following should be implemented immediately to rectify the existing problems outlined in Inquiry No. 1/99, Community Services Committee, 14 January, 1999. The recommended changes will not jeopardize the OPALS study in anyway, but will significantly improve the likelihood of fully obtaining the greatest number of P2s and obtaining certified Advanced Life Support Paramedics, not to mention, have a very positive effect on the Paramedic I candidates morale.

1. Immediately abandon the ambulance service quota system in favor of selecting and training the best candidates from any service on a Region wide basis to reach the designated 78 ALS paramedic goal.
2. Have real alternates. Provide the Paramedic I candidates with the pre-course material and support required to prepare up until the last possible minute
3. Have alternates automatically qualify for the next class, without having to be re-tested.
4. Continue to give priority to full-time candidates for training spots.

*Approved by
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