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Communications safety board signs off on emergency medical dispatch plan

By DAN SPRINGER | La Crosse Tribune

A La Crosse County panel voted Thursday to have county dispatchers transfer medical emergency calls to Gundersen Lutheran staff after first responders or paramedics have been set in motion so the hospital can advise callers while they wait for help.

The La Crosse County Public Safety Communications Governing Board approved a modified proposal that left initial dispatching duties with the La Crosse County dispatch center, gave the board operational control and agreed to bring the Emergency Medical Dispatch system up for review in one year.

The board still must approve a start-up plan that will be drafted by representatives of Tri-State Ambulance, La Crosse and Onalaska fire departments, the county fire officers association, county first responders, the La Crosse County and Gundersen Lutheran dispatch centers and Dr. Eric Voter, medical director for Tri-State and other agencies.

Under the plan, La Crosse County dispatchers will send emergency crews on calls and then transfer the caller to Gundersen's trained dispatchers to provide medical advice until first responders and paramedics arrive.

The proposal initially had been challenged by La Crosse and Onalaska city officials who argued it could increase response times and that dispatch should be run by a public and not private agency.

La Crosse County Emergency Services Administrator Jay Loeffler told the board having a county EMD is ideal but would cost almost \$100,000 to start and \$5,000 a year to run. It also would take months to design the program and train county dispatchers.

In a separate proposal, La Crosse Assistant Fire Chief Randy Loken repeated the city's contention a county EMD would ensure better service.

Loken did not dispute EMD has some expense but said the program can be done for less than Loeffler's projections. The city's numbers showed it would require about \$81,000 up front and \$4,500 a year, he said.

He urged the board to let Gundersen Lutheran give pre-arrival instructions, but to pursue a county EMD by spreading costs over two budget years and doing the program in phases, or pursuing grants and alternative funding.

The board did not discuss Loken's proposal or any long-term plans.

To read the report by Jay Loeffler, emergency services administrator for La Crosse County, [click here](#).

To read the proposal to La Crosse County by Randy Loken, assistant chief of the La Crosse Fire Department, http://www.lacrossetribune.com/news_pdfs/fd_emd_proposal.pdf target="_blank">click here.

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