



Performance Improvement Kit

How good is your agency?

January 2015



Why Should YOU Care about Quality???

With the ongoing consolidation and regionalization of healthcare in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) continues to be a vital part of the healthcare system with an increasing role in ensuring prompt access to emergency care and appropriate transportation for patients. **As an EMS agency and provider of EMS, you owe your community the highest quality of service possible!**

Your patients EXPECT it!

Most people don't think about EMS until they need it. But **when they do need EMS, they assume a competent provider equipped to meet their needs will show up in a timely manner** – even in the most rural and remote parts of Pennsylvania. This expectation assumes that someone in the community is looking after the EMS System and ensuring that vehicles are stocked and fueled, providers are appropriately trained, and ambulances are staffed and ready to be on their way in a moment's notice.

In EMS, Failure is NOT an option!

For the person in need, failure is not an option. Quality is the word we use to talk about assuring that the right personnel, equipment, vehicles and radios are always ready to respond and deliver the right care, in the right amount of time, to whomever needs help, whatever the emergency might be. Quality is about knowing how good your agency is, and exactly why and how you can make the claim that your service is good.

EMS DEMANDS

- ✓ RIGHT LEADERSHIP
- ✓ RIGHT PEOPLE
- ✓ RIGHT BEHAVIORS
- ✓ RIGHT ATTITUDE
- ✓ RIGHT EQUIPMENT
- ✓ RIGHT PROCEDURES
- ✓ RIGHT SKILLS
- ✓ RIGHT TIME
- ✓ RIGHT COST

QUALITY IS....

*DELIVERING THE SERVICE your community,
customers, and patients want and need,
EVERY TIME.*

QUALITY is **NOT** just a BUZZWORD

For some people quality is just a buzzword used by the statisticians, MBA types and CEOs. This may be because quality is difficult to define. Most of us can easily describe the differences between good quality and poor quality when it comes to haircuts, driving skills, and cooking. But what about your agency? **How do you know if you are operating a good quality or poor quality agency?**

About this Kit

This Basic Performance Improvement Kit was not developed to tell you what good quality EMS should be for your community; rather, it was designed to help you identify some of the basic attributes that will contribute to a good quality EMS agency. **The kit was designed to help you take a look at your agency from the perspective of your customers – the patients.** It is also designed to get you thinking about how to ensure that your agency is consistently providing the kind of service your patients and customers want and need.

Why should **QUALITY** be an **IMPORTANT** Part of your EMS Agency?

More than 10 years ago, the Institute of Medicine found that 44,000 patients died annually from medical errors in the U.S. In 2006, **The Institute of Medicine found that there was a widespread lack of accountability in EMS** and provided three recommendations for EMS leaders:



- ✦ Develop performance indicators
- ✦ Measure system performance
- ✦ Disseminate performance information

EMS agencies should use these three recommendations for building a Performance Improvement program. Although it may sound complicated or sophisticated, a Performance Improvement program need not require a lot of time or effort to be effective. **When a Performance Improvement program is applied as a continuous process, the rewards can be great.**

A Performance Improvement Program is the simple commitment to engage in activity in which you:

- **IDENTIFY** what's important
- **MEASURE** what's important
- **INFORM** others about how you are doing with what's important

Performance Indicators

What is a performance indicator?

A Performance Indicator is simply something you can measure that gives you information about how well you are doing. Thinking about this practically, when someone calls for an ambulance, what **truly matters** to them? First and foremost they want **help to arrive**. They may also care about how fast you get there, whether or not you are kind to them, and whether or not the patient and family perceives that the providers know what they are doing medically.

We are trained to take care of various emergency medical conditions. We have medical protocols that require us to deliver certain medical treatments for certain medical conditions and then record these treatments were done. A basic but important Performance Indicator is whether or not required treatments were delivered when indicated by the patient's signs and symptoms. Another basic but important indicator is whether or not treatments were recorded on the Patient Care Report (PCR) and whether that information was transferred to the hospital.

Performance Indicators are often described as goals.

For example, a Performance Indicator and goal may be as simple as "The EMS agency responded to all calls for help fully staffed 100% of the time."

Some EMS PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:

- **RESPONSE RELIABILITY:** how reliably the EMS agency responds to requests for help
- **CHUTE TIME:** the time from request to ambulance rolling toward call
- **RESPONSE TIME:** time from request to arrival at emergency scene
- **SCENE TIME:** time from arrival on scene to departure from scene
- **COMPLETED PATIENT CARE REPORTS:** report is completed, including vital signs and all times
- **SKILL PERFORMANCE SUCCESS:** a medical skill, such as airway insertion, was successfully performed
- **SERIAL VITAL SIGNS TAKEN ON ALL PATIENTS**
- **PATIENT CARE REPORTS MATCH MEDICAL PROTOCOLS:** PCR's reflect that medical protocols were properly followed
- **CRITICAL VEHICLE FAILURES:** vehicle fails and cannot complete response or transport

MEASURING Performance

How do you measure performance?

Measuring performance and keeping track of those measurement numbers allow you to compare how you are doing today with how you did in the past. Measuring performance also helps you measure how you are doing in comparison to other EMS agencies. Most importantly, measuring performance helps you see how you are doing with a goal you may set. If your goal is to respond to all requests 100% of the time, measuring and recording helps you see how you are doing – especially over time.

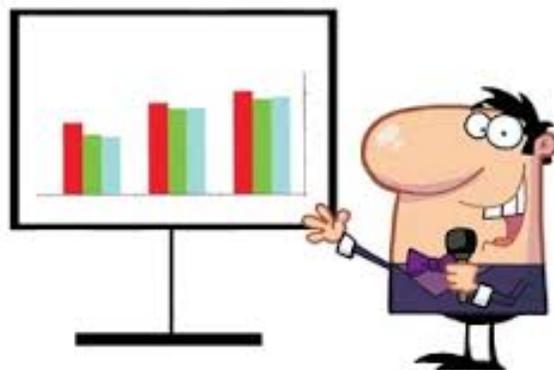
How would you measure whether or not the EMS agency responded to all calls fully staffed 100% of the time? For most EMS agencies, this would be measured on a monthly or quarterly basis and would require only two pieces of information:

1. The total number of times the ambulance was requested.
2. The number of times the ambulance actually responded fully staffed.

These numbers could be obtained from your own records or from your dispatch center. To calculate your performance, divide the second number into the first number.

By looking at this number for a specific time period, and over time, it can provide a clear numerical picture of your performance.

Performance information can be illustrated with simple graphs to show how well you are or are not doing over time.



Disseminating Performance Information

How does disseminating information help you?

By informing the people within your EMS agency and community about your performance over a period of time, you will be telling a story about your agency. If someone asks about your performance, you can specifically say how good you are. If you want to improve your performance, you know exactly how much you need to improve to meet the performance indicators.

Who may be interested in Performance Information?

- * EMS agency leaders and managers
- * EMS agency members
- * Your Medical Director
- * Your community members
- * Local government officials
- * Neighboring ambulance services
- * Regional EMS Council
- * Bureau of EMS, Department of Health

A CAUTION:

Sharing EMS agency performance information with your community **DOES NOT INCLUDE** sharing **PATIENT INFORMATION** or the details of how your agency is addressing specific clinical issues. All patient information and the details of the specific calls your agency or your Medical Director may review should **ALWAYS BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL**.

Storytelling Matters!

Here's how collecting and disseminating specific data about your agency can help:

- * If your performance is below what the public expects, having concrete numbers can help you know what you have to do to improve.
- * Telling an appropriate and convincing story can help you acquire the community resources you need to meet expectations.
- * When the community is informed of your agency's performance, the community shares the responsibility of making sure the service can be provided. That responsibility could be in the form of funding, staffing help, approving needed purchases, or in providing other resources that will enable you to improve the service.
- * When collection data and reporting occurs continually, you are practicing continuous quality improvement!

How can you BUILD a PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM in your agency?

To consistently know and report on how well you are doing, you need to make quality a part of your regular service activity. **Here's how you can build a basic performance improvement program.**

1. Appoint a Performance Improvement (PI) Committee:

Appoint a specific person in the agency to chair the Performance Improvement (PI) Committee, and gather additional members **including your agency medical director**. These people should care about how well the EMS agency is doing and be comfortable in using basic computer tools such as Microsoft Excel and email, but they don't need to be computer experts.

2. Identify areas of performance:

Charge the PI Committee with identifying areas of performance that are important to the EMS agency and the community. This can be done by talking with the agency members, the Medical Director, the Agency Manager, elected officials, hospital staff and the public to identify areas of performance that are locally important. The PI Committee should be given access to any information or tools needed to evaluate the areas of performance that are thought to be important to the community. Areas of performance might be: response reliability, response times, protocol compliance, or certain specific clinical areas, such as trauma, strokes or cardiac arrests.

3. Start with a SIMPLE checklist:

Many PI Committees find a checklist to be a good starting point. A checklist can be very simple and easy to use. A simple checklist asks YES or NO questions about performance. As the performance improvement plan is developed, the checklist can be refined and tuned to the individual needs of the EMS agency. To get you going, we have provided a sample list with this kit.



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What can you do when a performance goal is NOT being met?

Let's suppose you find that Patient Care Reports (PCR) are not being fully completed with response times and vital signs. What should you do? Here is a simple four-step process.

1. Investigate the Issue

Make the issue a topic of exploration. **Learn all you can about the issue.** Be open-minded. Don't assume the problem is just people being lazy. Consider all the processes in completing the PCR's. Talk with your EMT's and Paramedics. Ask people for input. Do not make the investigation about blaming people or pointing fingers. **Seek to truly understand the issue.**

2. Identify specific issues impacting performance

Specifically **identify system or process issues or people issues that may be impacting performance.** A system or process issue may be that the EMT or paramedic does not have enough time to complete the form after the call because your agency has the practice of leaving the hospital immediately after delivering a patient. A people issue may be that the EMT's or paramedics have not had the appropriate education or training about PCR's and do not recognize the importance of completed PCR's. More often than not, the issue is a system issue rather than a people issue. Make sure you look at how system issues are impacting how people respond and behave.

3. Take appropriate action

If you discover the performance problem is a system or a process issue, **involve the agency leadership and staff in changing the system or process.** If the issue is a people or person issue, provide the necessary information, counsel, or education and training to **ensure that people have what is needed to meet the expected performance.**

4. Measure again

After taking action and giving the action time to be incorporated, **measure the performance again and see if the action improves the performance.** If the performance is improved, continue the action. If performance is not improved, once again investigate, identify issues and take appropriate action.

Cautions

When considering performance issues avoid:



Knee Jerk Reactions

A simple problem can be made much worse if we respond with blame, globalizing or a complicated solution that is not well thought out. Before enacting changes, consider the issue and put into place fixes that are appropriate for the issue. If the issue is a system-wide issue, it will probably require a fix that is applied to the whole system, but on the other hand, if it is an individual issue, address the individual.

10 Dollar fixes for 10 Cent problem

Keep in mind the severity of an issue to avoid putting into place a 10 dollar fix for a 10 cent problem. For example, spending a large sum of money and time redesigning your entire PCR reporting system with new computers and software to remind providers to complete their PCR's is the wrong approach when a simple policy change and some education can do the trick.

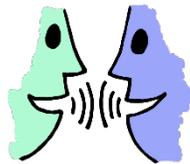


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Adjusting the quality program for local needs

The basic checklist serves as a starting point for agencies that do not have a formal performance improvement program. It is not intended to be used one time and forgotten nor is it intended to become a fixed static checklist used in its original form by everyone forever. With the cooperation of the EMS agency manager, Performance Improvement Committee, Medical Director and agency members, **the checklist should change over time** and adopt new or changed indicators of performance that are easily measurable and **important for your community**.



Talk to other EMS Agencies

Each agency has its own culture, environment, and own way of finding solutions. However, much can be learned from communicating with other EMS agencies.

We encourage communication between EMS agencies to share successes and challenges. Learning from each other often provides ideas, shortcuts and best practices for improving your own performance.

Southern Alleghenies EMS Council has a regional Performance Improvement Committee established to assist EMS agencies with their Performance Improvement planning and projects as well as provide assistance when needed.

Contact the Council at (814) 201-2265 for questions or additional assistance with your performance improvement planning.