

# A GUIDE TO CHOOSING APPROPRIATE PATIENT TRANSPORTATION

## Introduction

This guide is intended as a reference for planners, providers and users of medical transportation, particularly those involved in arranging patient transfers.

There have been recent amendments to the Ambulance Act which impact on ambulance and non-ambulance use for transporting people in need of medical services.

Among other things, the amendments provide a new definition for the term "ambulance" and "ambulance service". They expressly stipulate when an ambulance must be used to transport a patient and implicitly provide for when an alternative vehicle, such as an accessible taxi or a private medical transport service could be considered for patient transfers.

While increasing demand for medical transportation and the emergence of a non-ambulance transportation sector will influence decisions on vehicle selection, the amendments to the province's Ambulance Act will help in clarifying when an ambulance should be selected as the preferred vehicle to transport persons in need of medical services.

The Ministry's position on the use of ambulance resources has not changed. There will be more effective and efficient medical transportation if ambulance resources are directed to patients whose needs necessitate the use of an ambulance and if other forms of patient transportation are used only when it is safe and appropriate to do so.

## Ambulance Act Amendments

### **56. (1) The definition of "ambulance" and "ambulance service" in Section 1 of the Ambulance Act are repealed and the following substituted:**

"ambulance" means a conveyance used or intended to be used for the transportation of persons who,:

- (a) have suffered a trauma or an acute onset of illness either of which could endanger their life, limb or function, or
- (b) have been judged by a physician or a health care provider designated by a physician to be in an unstable medical condition and to require while being transported, the care of a physician, nurse, other health care provider, emergency medical attendant or paramedic, and the use of a stretcher;

"ambulance service" means a service, including the service of dispatching ambulances, that is held out to the public as available for the conveyance of persons by ambulance.

**(2) Section 1 of the Act is amended by adding the following definitions:**

"emergency medical attendant" means a person employed by or a volunteer in an ambulance service who meets the qualifications for an emergency medical attendant as set out in the regulations, but does not include a paramedic or a physician, nurse or other health care provider who attends on a call for an ambulance;

"paramedic" means a person employed by or a volunteer in an ambulance service who meets the qualifications for an emergency medical attendant as set out in the regulations, and who is authorized to perform one or more controlled medical acts under the authority of a base hospital medical director, but does not include a physician, nurse or other health care provider who attends on a call for an ambulance.

**(3) Subsection 22 (1 ) of the Act is amended by adding the following clause:**

- (h) prescribing the standard of care to be provided to persons by emergency medical attendants and paramedics.

**Application and Interpretation**

The amendments do not prohibit the use of an ambulance at any time. An ambulance may be used to transport persons in need of medical services where no other means of transportation is available, or where ambulance use is judged to be appropriate for some other reason.

Clauses (a) and (b) of the amendment to the definition of "ambulance" clarify the situations where an ambulance should be the vehicle of choice.

Clause (a) refers essentially to emergencies. As has always been the requirement, only an ambulance may be used to transport a person in an emergency situation.

Clause (b) refers to a specific non-emergency situation involving three conditions that, should they all exist at the same time, would make an ambulance the appropriate vehicle for medical transport. This situation is where the person has been judged by a physician or a physician's designate to be:

- i) in an unstable condition
- ii) in need of an escort
- iii) in need of a stretcher

**Note:** i) This guide and the amendments, as noted above, will have greater relevance to users if they are interpreted and applied in conjunction with a review of the other sections of the Ambulance Act.

- ii) These amendments do not affect coverage under the Health Insurance Act or co-payments under its regulations.

### **Choosing Medical Transportation**

Choose an ambulance when:

1. It is an emergency situation.
2. The person has been judged by a physician or a health care provider designated by a physician to be:
  - unstable
  - in need of a nurse, other primary care provider, emergency medical attendant or paramedic en route
  - in need of a stretcher
3. An ambulance is the only available means of transportation and/or ambulance use is deemed to be the most appropriate option to transport the patient.

### **Consider an alternative to an ambulance when:**

- a. It is not an emergency situation.
- b. The three criteria in #2 above are not met.
- c. The situation in #3 above does not apply.

Alternative medical transportation may include accessible taxis, stretcher capable private medical transport services, and transportation services operated by volunteer agencies.

### **Contact for Questions about this Guide**

If you have any comments or questions about this guide you may contact Mr. Leslie Sands with the Ministry of Health's Emergency Health Programs Section.

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