



MEDIA RELEASE

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Winnipeg's Emergency Medical Services in Critical Condition

2006/10/19 – The Paramedic Association of Manitoba has called on Winnipeg's mayoral candidates to make treating the City's ailing emergency medical services (EMS) system a top priority following next weeks civic election.

In correspondence sent to all four mayoral candidates on Tuesday (October 17th), the Paramedic Association of Manitoba outlined concerns related to Winnipeg's EMS system, and suggested that a newly elected Mayor "needs to show leadership by halting the current amalgamation strategy and asking all stakeholders to work collectively in efforts to ensure a sustainable and effective EMS system for Winnipeg".

Ongoing ambulance shortages, a steady decline in the experience level of paramedics and difficulties recruiting and retaining paramedics are just some of the problems associated with Winnipeg's EMS system as a direct result of the amalgamation strategy. The amalgamation of Winnipeg's fire and paramedic services began over a decade ago, at a time when municipalities were still responsible for providing ambulance services, in response to rising costs associated with the City's emergency services and a steady increase in emergency medical calls.

"Unfortunately a decision that was made over a decade ago appears to be having a very negative impact on today's EMS system", says Eric Glass, Chairman of the Paramedic Association of Manitoba. "In reality it was a political decision made for all the wrong reasons. It's resulted in a reluctance to find alternatives to existing ambulance shortages, and a problem replacing experienced paramedics as they leave. That's a real concern when it comes to ensuring patients are receiving appropriate emergency medical care when they need it".

"We've made our concerns known to the City, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and the province. While everyone acknowledges there are problems, there seems to be reluctance for any party to initiate discussions around this topic. We're asking Winnipeg's next Mayor to take charge and show leadership in this area. Manitoba needs a more consistent and efficient EMS system province-wide...here is an opportunity for both levels of government to dialogue with the Regional Health Authorities and make that happen".



A number of factors have changed since Winnipeg first decided to embark on the path of amalgamating their fire and paramedic services. The responsibility for the provision of ambulance service has been shifted from municipalities to the Regional Health Authorities. Changing demographics and health care trends have resulted in the need for more advanced pre-hospital care. Educational requirements for paramedics increased significantly with the introduction of nationally recognized competency profiles. And problems associated with increasing Emergency Department backlogs have placed greater demands on EMS resources.

“We’re seeing a need for paramedics to have much closer ties to our health system for many reasons, something that probably wasn’t envisioned by Winnipeg ten years ago”, adds Glass. “In fact, current health reform strategies recommend that paramedics be more fully integrated into our healthcare system”.

Background Data

- Winnipeg “runs out of ambulances” on a very frequent basis;
- 39% of Winnipeg Paramedics working on ambulances have less than three years experience;
- 51% of Winnipeg Paramedics working on ambulances have less than five years experience;
- 50% of the Paramedics hired by Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service (WFPS) in the past three years have transferred to Fire Suppression;
- 5% of Winnipeg’s Paramedics have resigned from WFPS in the past three years to pursue alternative practice options;
- 15 Paramedics were hired by WFPS in 2006, 4 resigned, 11 transferred to Fire Suppression, 3 retired and 8 were promoted to managerial positions, leaving a net of minus 11.
- Education to become a Primary Care Paramedic can take 1 – 2 years; education to become an Advanced Care Paramedic takes 2 – 3 years;
- Ambulance service is a Core Health service and a responsibility of the Regional Health Authorities, not Civic or Municipal government;
- The Emergency Medical Services Chiefs of Canada, this country’s management leaders in emergency medical services, believes the value of EMS in the future is linked to an expanded role in primary health care and the Canadian Health Care system.

The Paramedic Association of Manitoba is the professional association for paramedics licensed to practice in Manitoba, promoting excellence in pre-hospital emergency medical care.