



Franklin Township, New Jersey

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE
FUTURE OF EMERGENCY MEDICAL
SERVICES DELIVERY**

October 2009

FINAL REPORT



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Recommendations for the Future of Emergency Medical Services Delivery

Franklin Township, New Jersey

Submitted to:

Franklin Township Committee
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INTRODUCTION

Franklin Township, New Jersey is a municipality of approximately 3,200 residents located in the southern part of Hunterdon County. Emergency Medical Services is provided by the Quakertown Volunteer EMS Company (QVEMS) with first responder service provided by the Quakertown Volunteer Fire Company (QVFC). QVEMS provides EMT-B level care and transportation; non-transport paramedic service is provided Hunterdon County Hospital Advanced Life Support Service. In 2008, of the 163 EMS calls in the Township, 115 (71%) were handled by QVEMS, 43 (26%) by Clinton EMS, and 5 (4%) by Kingwood EMS.¹

The fire first responder/volunteer EMT-B transport/hospital-based paramedic support model is common throughout New Jersey. This model or a variation is found throughout the United States. In Franklin Township, the QVFC provides first responder service using a Quick Response Vehicle (QRU) that is smaller than a fire engine, can be driven by more personnel, and is economically efficient to operate. QVEMS operates traditional basic life support ambulances capable of providing EMT-B level care and transporting patients to the hospital. The hospital-based paramedic unit responds to EMS calls that may require advanced care such as unconscious patients, cardiac emergencies, stroke, major trauma, and similar incidents.

The QVFC and the QVEMS are volunteer-based, but QVEMS has recently added some part-time paid EMT-Bs. Paramedic service is provided by career paramedics employed by the Hunterdon Hospital Advanced Life Support program. The QVFD or the QVEMS companies do not directly bill for services. The QVFD is supported by a local fire tax and community donations. The QVEMS is funded primarily from community donations with a stipend from the township.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Franklin Township, NJ wants to determine how EMS should be provided in Franklin Township. During the past two years, the Township Council became aware of the QVFD concerns about the QVEMS ability to respond in a timely manner. Response times and other issues have the Township Council concerned that the current EMS delivery model may be detrimental to patient care and community safety. Attempts at discussion and community-based mediation have been unable to resolve the situation.

¹ Data provided by Hunterdon County 911 Center.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

The Franklin Township, NJ governing authority contracted with SPC/TriData, a professional EMS and fire consulting firm, to provide an unbiased evaluation to guide the township in deciding how EMS should be provided to its residents and visitors.

TriData was to provide the Township Committee with recommendations on how EMS should be provided and by which organizations. This report summarized our findings and recommendations.

METHODS

TriData combined qualitative and quantitative methods to determine which recommendations would be made to Franklin Township. They included:

- Phone interviews with chief officers from the QVFD and QVEMS;
- Meetings in Franklin Township with officials and members of the QVFD and the QVEMS;
- Meetings with township, county, mutual aid responders, and members of the healthcare community to determine pertinent facts; and
- Analysis of response time data for units providing EMS within the Township.

FACTS AND FINDINGS

Based on the above methods, TriData determined the following facts:

1. EMS in Franklin Township is primarily provided by the QVEMS, with Clinton Township EMS, and Kingwood EMS providing primary service to a small area of the township. Clinton, Kingwood, and Flemington-Raritan EMS provide back-up for QVEMS. Atlantic Ambulance, a commercial EMS company, also is available in the area but does not routinely provide service.
2. Township Ordinance 2007-06 authorized the QVFD to continue providing fire and rescue services within the boundaries of Franklin Township.²
3. On December 1, 2008, the QVFD placed in-service a non-transport Quick Response Unit (QRU), that allows EMTs and first responders to quickly respond to emergency medical incidents within the township. Between December 2008

² Franklin Township Committee (n.d.). Ordinance 2007-06.

and July 2009, the average response time for the QRU was 5 minutes and 54 seconds. During the same time, the QVEMS average response time was 12 minutes.

4. The QVFD established an extensive Standard Operating Guideline governing operation of the QRU.³
5. Since its inception, QVFD QRU has responded to 144 calls, with a staff of 19 EMT-Bs and 8 first responders. QVEMS has a staff of 26 who have responded to calls in 2009. The QVEMS responds to approximately 220 calls per year, with approximately 160 occurring in Franklin Township (exact numbers depend on sources used).
6. In July 2009, the QVEMS began to pay EMTs to provide coverage between 5:00 AM and 10:00 PM. The EMTs are paid \$12.25 per hour. A paid administrator, whose salary is approximately \$40K per year, also provides some of the EMT-B coverage. After starting to use paid personnel, the average *time en route* dropped from 8 minutes in June to 2 minutes in September. Average *arrival at-scene* times were reduced from an average of 11 minutes in June to 8 minutes in September.⁴ No data were available concerning response times during paid vs. all volunteer times.
7. Based on their figures, the QVEMS should expect to spend \$15,202 in salary for EMTs during the first year (Table 1).

Table 1: EMT Salary Cost per Year

Salary Cost Per Hour	Hours per Day	Days Per Year	EMTs Per Day	Cost Per Day	Cost Per Year
\$12.25	17	365	2	\$416.50	\$15,202

The above cost does not include the approximately \$40,000 per year for a paid administrator and an additional 20% for tax contribution, workers compensation, and other costs. The total personnel cost per year may be closer to \$68,000 (which averages to a cost of \$417.17 per call).

1. QVEMS reports that an expected increase in volunteer EMT-Bs will allow them to phase out paid providers during 2010. They expect 5 new EMTs to be certified

³ QVFD. (2008). Standard Operating Guideline No. 91-08-03, Quick Response Unit (QRU), Revision 3. Revision 3, November 17, 2008.

⁴ QVEMS (2009). QVEMS Presentation to Dr. Cohen. October 23, 2009.

in January 2010. According to Resolution 2009-57, these new EMT-Bs will not be able to operate for six months without an experienced EMT-B present.

2. QVFD funding is provided by a fire tax levied by the district fire commissioners. Additional funding is provided through private donations. QVEMS is self-sustaining with an approximately \$22K annual stipend provided by the township. This amount equates to \$134.96 per call. The QVEMS did not submit a voucher for their 2008 stipend.

3. Due to conflicts between EMS responders from both agencies, the Township asked retired New Jersey Supreme Court Judge John W. Fritz (a township resident) to mediate an agreement between the organizations. On November 28, 2008, Judge Fritz reported that the QVFD and QVEMS had overcome enough personal differences and agreed to develop a resolution that outlines how both agencies will handle EMS responses.⁵

4. On June 11, 2009, the Franklin Township passed Resolution 2009-57 that outlined an agreement between QVFD and QVEMS on the operation of a QRU unit. The resolution listed 18 points of agreement to be followed by both organizations. The major points emphasize patient care, teamwork, and that internal complaints should be forwarded to the respective chiefs and not to outside agencies.⁶

5. Shortly after enactment of the resolution, the QVEMS complained to the Township Committee that the QVFD was not following Resolution 2009-57. They requested that both organizations agree to state mediation. The request was denied by the QVFD. The Township is not eligible for free mediation by the New Jersey State Board of Mediation. They are likely eligible for services available through the New Jersey Supreme Court Committee on Complimentary Dispute Resolution. These costs of these services are usually split between the disputing parties.⁷

6. Both organizations claim that the Resolution has been violated by the other.

These are isolated incidents that should be handled by the respective chiefs as outlined in Resolution 2009-57. Anonymous complaints were filed with the New

⁵ Fritz, J.W. (2008). Letter to the Mayor and Township Committee, Franklin Township, Hunterdon County, November 28, 2008. Unfortunately, Judge Fritz died shortly after the letter was written.

⁶ Township of Franklin. (2009). Resolution 2009-57. Approved on June 11, 2009.

⁷ (2005). Statewide Mediation Program. [On-Line].
<http://www.judiciary.state.nj.us/services/medprog.htm>.

- Jersey Office of EMS, all of which were determined not to warrant state level action.⁸
7. The Town Committee has been very frustrated by the inability of both organizations to work together in a collegial manner. A July 10, 2008 letter to the editor of a local paper from a QVEMS officer threatened that the QVEMS could move from Franklin Township or that members would stop responding to calls within the Township.⁹ The Township Committee was concerned that continuous coverage could be compromised.
 8. There has been no additional action concerning QVEMS moving, but several members have discontinued responding to calls within Franklin Township.
 9. Meetings with QVFD officials revealed that the company is very organized and progressive. They are interested in providing quality patient care to the township whether they provide QRU services or full service EMS. They have a preliminary plan on how to structure their organization to adopt full service EMS including:
 - a. Changing the name of the organization to the "Quakertown Fire and Rescue Service."
 - b. Adding an EMS Chain of Command to the organization to include a deputy chief, captain, and lieutenant for EMS.
 - c. Adding an administrative vice-president for EMS
 - d. Encouraging members from the QVEMS organization to join the organization.
 - e. Purchase of an ambulance to be readied for service.
 - f. Willingness to purchase additional ambulances.
 - g. Changing their operation to include a staffed EMS crew instead of a "scramble crew."
 - h. Submitting an application for membership in the NJ State EMS Council.
 10. The QVEMS is comprised of dedicated volunteers who are interested in providing quality EMS care to the community. Their slate of officers will soon be changing and the person serving as their paid administrator is likely to take over as chief. The major difference between is that QVEMS is not interested in merging organizations and wants to be the sole provider of EMS for the township. Another difference is that the QVEMS relied on ad homonym criticism of QVFD officers and members.

The QVEMS offered the following resolutions to the current problems:

⁸ Personal Communications, NJOEMS, October 27, 2009

⁹ Mott-Kocsis, M. (2008), Members are Insulted, Hunterdon County Democrat, July 10, 2008.

- a. A recommendation that the Town Committee suspend the QVFD QRU
- b. Purchase a quick response (FAST) unit.
- c. Have the fire company revert back to fire and extrication only responses
- d. QVFD members may apply for membership at QVEMS. There are voting restrictions on persons holding dual memberships.

11. On September 13, 2009, an incident occurred between the two organizations that has further inflamed tensions. During a rescue call, a QVFD unit allegedly passed a QVEMS ambulance, forcing the ambulance into a ditch. There were minor injuries among two EMS providers, none requiring ambulance service. There were at least two local newspaper articles and several features on national blogs and websites.¹⁰ The Franklin Township police investigated the incident and closed the matter without issuing any traffic summonses.¹¹

12. While the incident itself is beyond the scope of this report, but contributes to the situation. Specifics on how the incident contributes include:

- a. Like with many public safety agencies, there are occasions when drivers overuse the rights granted them to disregard certain traffic laws. This leads to occasional instances of aggressive driving. Chiefs of public safety organizations must have strict policies for driving under emergency conditions and remedial policies for those who violate the rules. My understanding is that the QVFD conducted an internal investigation and that actions are in progress. Because they involve personnel matters, the details have not been made public.
- b. There must be clear rules for members driving their personal vehicles to the call or the station.
 - i. Unless the member directly passes the emergency, they should respond to the station.
 - ii. Members granted "blue light" privileges must have dispatch frequency radio receivers in the vehicle. When the alerted unit has called en route, "blue light" use should cease.
 - iii. The chiefs and town public safety director should have regular dialogue concerning complaints or response issues.
- c. On September 27, 2009, the QVEMS sent a letter to the community criticizing the actions of the QVFD, the media, and the Town Committee. They concluded that even though the QVFD QRU was not involved in the incident, the Town Committee should withdraw

¹⁰ Quigley, T. (2009). Ambulance Chased Off Road. The Express-Times. September 18, 2009, p. 1.

¹¹ Deegan, J. & Quigley, T. (2009). Police Close Inquiry into Ambulance Crash. The Express-Times. September 19, 2009

permission for the QRU to respond. No logical explanation was included that associated the QRU with the incident.¹²

- d. On October 13, 2009, a QVEMS member filed a request that the Hunterdon County Municipal Court issue a summons to the QVFD driver for reckless driving. The summons was delivered on October 27, 2009. According to QVEMS officials, "tort claims" will soon follow.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The QVFD and QVEMS are dedicated to providing excellent EMS care to the residents and visitors of Franklin Township, NJ. Each group has very talented and dedicated members whose main objective is to serve the community.
2. Almost all of the conflicts between QVEMS and QVFD are personal in nature, many directed at the organizations leadership or former members of one company now affiliated with the other. Leadership from a single organization is the appropriate direction needed to resolve these issues.
3. Having two organizations providing EMS to the township is counterproductive, overly redundant, and simply unnecessary. A combined organization that would include members, facilities, equipment, and revenue streams would create a powerful organization that could guarantee fire and EMS coverage and reduce taxes to the citizens.
4. Unfortunately, it appears that a merging of organizations will not be acceptable to the QVEMS. This is unfortunate because combining organizations would serve as a good example to the New Jersey fire and EMS communities in regard to economies of scales and efficiency.
5. The frustrations of the Township Committee are understandable, especially when you realize that the township has only 160 EMS calls annually.
6. If QVEMS is not present, Clinton EMS, Flemington-Raritan EMS, and other local services are available and their resources will not be strained. Clinton EMS and Flemington-Raritan EMS have full-time, paid services, and charge for their services. Almost all of the costs are covered by Medicare, Medicaid, or private insurance. Both services are state licensed and a stipend from the Township would not be necessary.

¹² Hutcheson, S. (2009). QVEMS Letter to Franklin Township Residents. September 27, 2009.

7. The QVFD should provide first responder QRU services on for all Township EMS calls. This policy will limit extended response times for EMS care.
8. The QVFD is capable of taking over ambulance service for the Township. Having an ambulance within the Township is not essential, but if desired, the QVFD could deliver the service.
9. The QVEMS has the financial means to support supplemental paid personnel and a paid administrator. Even so, just because the money is there, doesn't mean that it should be spent on unnecessary services. A paid staff for ~ 220 annual calls is not cost effective. It appears that the QVEMS is liquidating their assets instead of properly merging resources.
10. There is no logic or appropriate reason for the QVEMS to request that the QVFD QRU cease operations. While the squad could afford a QRU unit, it's just unnecessary.
11. Based on TriData's assessment, the QVFD is willing to change their organization to accommodate the delivery of EMS. Conversely, the QVEMS seems unwilling to collaborate and has *dug in their heels* regarding EMS issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TriData's recommendations were not easily arrived at in light of the feelings of various competent individuals who are at odds here. Regardless, a decision is needed to move forward and protect the community with as efficient service as possible. We recommend that the Town Committee's decision be implemented immediately. Delay will further intensify conflicts and possibly threaten patient care.

1. The Town Committee should instruct Hunterdon County 911 to remove QVEMS from all running assignments in Franklin Township.
2. The QVFD QRU should respond on all EMS incidents in Franklin Township.
3. Clinton EMS and Flemington-Raritan EMS should be added to the Franklin Township areas previously served by QVEMS. These companies should be permitted to charge standard rates for their services.
4. By July 1, 2010, the QVFD should develop a formal plan for EMS that will indicate if they will assume responsibility for EMS transportation or continue to provide exclusive QRU service.
5. If the QVFD believes that it may take on EMS transportation, then members should arrange to gain more experience by riding with Clinton or Flemington

- EMS. Clinton EMS already allows this and Flemington believes they should be able to assist.
6. Having a transport ambulance in Franklin Township is not essential, but may be desired by the residents.
 7. If the QVFD elects to assume ambulance transportation, then one ambulance will be sufficient. The ambulance would be the primary responder on medical emergencies. The QRU would respond as needed to assist the ambulance. If the ambulance is on a call or out of service, then the QRU will provide first responder services.
 8. The QVFD should begin to make the organizational changes necessary to accommodate the possible new group of members. This includes conducting special planning meetings and elections necessary to amend any constitution or bylaws.
 9. Mutual aid agreements should be reviewed and modified as needed.

The Franklin Township Committee should expect active "pushback" from the QVEMS regarding these recommendations. We believe that the Township must have oversight of all public safety elements within their borders. This proactive step, while difficult, will be in the best interest of Franklin Township's residential and business community.

After the above changes are made, the response times and quality of patient care should be monitored closely for at least the next six months, and the situation formally reevaluated then to see if any adjustments are needed.