

LEON COUNTY E.M.S.

Standard Operating Guideline

Title: Release of Information to the Media

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I. PURPOSE:

To provide guidelines for the release of information to the media.

II. GUIDELINE:

LCEMS shall cooperate with the news media through the release of information which will not violate the patient's right to privacy and HIPAA requirements. At all times members of the media will be treated in a professional manner. Information will be released by the County PIO or Chief only after thorough review of the request, which may include consultation with the Privacy/Information Security Officer and County Attorney's Office. Staff members are not permitted to release information to the news media, including patient records or reports at any time unless authorized by the Chief.

III. PROCEDURE:

1. Information and interview requests will be directed to the Public Education Captain. When Public Education Captain is not available requests will be directed to Command Staff (Captain or higher). The Chief will be notified of all media inquiries. The Chief will notify the County PIO and County Administrator.
2. Information releases and interviews will be approved by the County PIO or the EMS Chief, after thorough review of the request by the Privacy/Information Security Officer and the County Attorney's Office, prior to being completed. The exception will be interviews done on the scene of events by Command Staff (on-duty supervisor or higher). In these instances only information such as the type of event, assets being utilized, number injured and basic facts that do not violate patient privacy can be given prior to approval. The following are examples of information that can be released by Command Staff during on the scene interviews:
 - a. Name of hospital. You may provide the name of the hospital to which patients have been transported. (Acceptable Example: The media calls about "the accident at Third and Main earlier this afternoon." You may inform the media "a patient was transported from the accident scene to ABC Hospital."). **THE NAME OF THE PATIENT SHALL NOT BE RELEASED TO THE MEDIA.** It is not appropriate for us to confirm or deny the identity of a patient. Requests for

patient identity should be directed to a law enforcement agency or to the hospital.

- b. Number of patients. You may provide the total number of patients involved in an accident or transported to a facility. You may not indicate specifics about the vehicle a patient was driving or which patient went to a particular facility. (Acceptable Example: You may inform the media that “four patients were transported from the fire at the ABC Chemical Factory. Two were taken to County General and two were taken to the Regional Medical Center.”)
- c. Age & Gender. You may provide the age of a patient and the gender of the patient, unless it could reasonably be used to identify the patient. (Acceptable Example: You may inform the media “a 39 y/o male was transported from the accident on the Interstate.” You would not want to disclose to the media “a 39 y/o male was transported from 124 Main St.”)
- d. Designation of crew members. The designation of crew members as paramedics or EMTs is not protected health information. You may state, for example, that one paramedic and two EMTs were involved in caring for the patients involved in a motor vehicle accident. (DO not identify the names of the personnel who responded). You are not permitted to describe the specific type of care rendered to patients at the scene or on the way to the hospital. Nor may you speculate on what injuries a patient may or may not have sustained. (Acceptable Example: ABC personnel on the scene of the incident included two paramedics and a supervisor and advanced life support was administered.”)
- e. Type of Transport. You may indicate that a particular call was an emergency and that transportation was facilitated by ambulance or helicopter. Do not speculate on the patient’s condition even if you are sure of that condition. For example, do not disclose to a member of the media that a patient was critical or stable unless you are comfortable in knowing this to be their general condition. (Acceptable Example: “Of the 3 patients on the scene of the incident, one was transported by helicopter to the ABC Trauma Center and two were transported as non-emergency patients to the local hospital emergency department.”)
- f. Non-PHI. Information that is not classified as PHI may be released to the media consistent with County policy. For instance, information about a fire response or a standby that did not involve patient care may be released to the media, as may general information about an event. (Acceptable Example: “We treated 45 patients during the two-day festival, and 6 were transported to local hospitals for various heat-related complaints”).
- g. If at any time you are unclear about whether information may be disclosed to the media, always err on the side of caution and do not disclose the questionable item of information.

3. Major incidents and other news worthy events will be immediately reported to the on-duty supervisor. The on-duty supervisor will notify the Chiefs who will then notify the County PIO and County Administrator.