

Rural health office awards EMS conference scholarships



The Texas Department of Agriculture's State Office of Rural Health (SORH) awarded 57 scholarships for rural EMS personnel to attend the 2012 Texas EMS Conference held November 11–14 in Austin. Recipients were selected from 120 applicants based on service in a rural or frontier county, volunteer status and length of time since last attendance at Texas EMS Conference. The recipients, who serve 33 rural Texas counties, had the chance to attend more than 150 different continuing education sessions. The Texas Department of Agriculture understands the difficulty rural EMS providers have in obtaining continuing education for recertification. The annual EMS conference is a major source of CE for EMS providers around the state. SORH provided scholarships to increase the number of attendees able to attend from rural and frontier counties. The unique needs of Texas' rural constituents make the knowledge, skills, and leadership development opportunities offered by Texas EMS Conference invaluable.

SORH knows EMS services are an important component of collaborative regional and local health delivery systems and serve a pivotal role in regional and state trauma systems. SORH encourages the development and improvement of rural EMS response, delivery and service capacity by providing assistance through various grant opportunities throughout the year. Check the website for current grant opportunities at www.texasagriculture.gov/GrantsServices/RuralEconomicDevelopment/StateOfficeofRuralHealth/RuralHealthGrants.aspx.

AHRQ releases 2011 state snapshots

Texas pulled a below-average report card on health care quality in many of the categories reported in a recent report by the Agency for Healthcare Quality and Research, a part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The report, found in AHRQ's 2011 State Snapshots, provides an in-depth analysis of the quality of care provided in each state by type of condition, level of care, treatment setting, race and income, and insurance status. While Texas did not do well in many of the categories overall, among the 150 different quality measures, there were bright spots, such as palliative care nursing homes and vaccination rates for children. To find state snapshots, featuring easy-to-read charts and individual state performance summaries, go to <http://statesnapshots.ahrq.gov> and click on State Snapshots as it becomes available under the pictured topics in the middle of the page.

Feds release ambulance provider costs in report

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has released a report on ground ambulance provider costs and Medicare margins, as required by the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012. This report updates the GAO's 2007 report and examines three themes: 2010 ground ambulance providers' costs for furnishing transports, the relationship between 2010 Medicare payments and ground ambulance providers' costs, and Medicare beneficiaries' use of ground ambulance transports in 2010. For more information or to view the entire report, go to www.gao.gov/products/GAO-13-6.

Report: Seat belt use at record high

A recent poll by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration shows 86 percent of all motorists now buckling up, a dramatic increase in seat belt use from 58 percent in 1994. The most dramatic increase was seen in southern states, which went from a rate of 80 percent in 2011 to 85 percent in 2012. New NHTSA research shows that in states with primary enforcement (vehicle occupants can be pulled over solely for not wearing seat belts), the rate rises to 90 percent. The highest usage is in the West, with a 94 percent rate of seat belt use.





Hurricane relief funds provide aid to responders

For those wishing to make donations to assist EMS colleagues in New York City impacted by Hurricane Sandy, the NYC EMS Blacksheep Hurricane Sandy Disaster Relief Project is assisting EMS colleagues who lost all their possessions as a result of Hurricane Sandy. Donations can be made to Blacksheep Relief Effort for Emergency Personnel at www.workingsaintsusa.org. Click on the donate button complete the PayPal form and write “Relief Effort” in the special instructions area. You also may send a check or money order to Working Saints USA, P.O. Box 51084, Fort Myers, Florida 33994.

On Duty

Report details impact of drug shortage on emergency care

The Emergency Care Coordination Center (ECCC) has issued a report titled “The Impact of the National Drug Shortage on Emergency Care.” Over the last six years, drug shortages of medications have nearly quadrupled from a peak of approximately 70 drugs in shortage during 2006 to 267 today. It is estimated that nearly 40 percent of drugs in shortage impact the delivery of emergency care. The national drug shortage is so acute that at times the only way health care administrators have known a drug is in shortage is when it was missing from a manufacturer’s shipment. A meeting of stakeholders held in April 2012 and hosted by the ECCC gathered input from private medical and pharmaceutical organizations on what they considered to be the factors and effects of the national drug shortage and on the coping strategies they have employed. For additional information, go to www.nasemso.org/documents/ImpactOfTheNationalDrugShortageOnEmergencyCareApril2012.pdf.



Feds clarify patient data question

After hearing that some EMS providers are having difficulty getting patient outcome data from hospitals, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has released an “information sheet” to clarify the circumstances under which the federal HIPAA Privacy rule permits hospitals to share patient data with an EMS agency for quality improvement activities. In short, if both the hospital and EMS provider are HIPAA covered entities, the hospital may share patient health outcome information for certain health care operations activities of the EMS provider, such as quality improvement activities, as long as both entities have (or have had) a relationship with the patient in question. The hospital may share the information without the patient’s authorization, but must make reasonable efforts to disclose only the minimum amount of individually identifiable health information needed for the activity. However, it is best to read the entire letter and information sheet before making a decision to ask for information, as feds have listed exclusions and definitions in the information. The HHS letter and information sheet are posted on the DSHS website at www.dshs.state.tx.us/emstraumasystems. Click on “Guidance for EMS and Hospital Data Sharing” under News/Features.

Bed bug cure could be worse than bite

According to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an increase in the misuse of pesticides to treat infestations of bed bugs and other indoor insects has been reported. Some pesticides are being applied indoors even though they are approved only for outdoor use. Even pesticides that are approved for indoor use can cause harm if over-applied or not used as instructed on the product label. Of the 169 related calls from January 2006 through December 2010, the National Pesticide Information Center reports that 129 resulted in mild or serious health effects (including one death) for persons living in affected residences. Consumers should also be aware of recent cases where pest control companies illegally sprayed outdoor pesticides indoors to control bed bugs. In some cases, these pesticides were found at levels that harmed or could have harmed people's health. In some cases, residents were relocated until their homes could be decontaminated. Children and pets are particularly affected.

Information on how to treat indoor pests can be found through the Environmental Protection Agency (www.epa.gov/bedbugs) and the National Pesticide Information Center (www.npic.orst.edu/pest/bedbug.html). Or call your local poison control center at 1-800-222-1222 or the National Pesticide Information Center at 1-800-858-7378. You can also call the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Information Line at 1-800-CDC-INFO for information about pesticides.



January 15 deadline for uncompensated care application

The deadline for the Uncompensated Trauma Care funding application is fast approaching. The notarized application for fiscal year (FY) 2013 application must be emailed, and the email must be dated no later than January 15, 2013. To be eligible for the allocation, a hospital must be a designated trauma facility by the application due date or meet "in active pursuit of trauma designation" requirements by the application due date. Late applications cannot be accepted.

Group produces trauma system video and booklet

The National Conference of State Legislatures has produced a short educational video on trauma systems that provides a good overview of what an EMS/trauma system is and what it can do. Called "The Right Patient, The Right Place, The Right Time," the video is available online at www.ncsl.org/issues-research/health/trauma-ems-overview.aspx.

On Duty

2013 GETAC meeting dates

February 27-March 1

May 15-17

August 21-23

November 23-25

(in conjunction with Texas EMS Conference)