

Helicopters called in time of need

Written by Chris Lee

When it is needed, Melissa Memorial Hospital has the capability of calling a helicopter to help transport patients to other health care facilities in Colorado.

MMH is partnered with numerous organizations that offer either a fixed wing or helicopter service to transfer patients from Holyoke to a higher level of care.

A question from the community prompted the Enterprise to look into the subject a little further. How many helicopters come in each year to transfer patients? What state of emergency is it when a patient is transported via helicopter? Where do the patients go after leaving MMH and Holyoke?

“It is absolutely a case by case basis,” MMH administrator John Ayoub said of the decisions to transfer patients via helicopter.

Looking at the numbers, 16 patients have been transferred via helicopter from MMH through the first six months of this year.

A year ago, in 2011, 27 patients were transported by helicopter which proved to be the highest number over the past four years. In 2010, 14 were flown, 15 in 2009 and seven in 2008.

The numbers show an increase over the past four years. Ayoub said part of that could be MMH is seeing more and more patients which increases the odds of needing a transfer via helicopter.

Ayoub said helicopter transfers are dependent on the doctor who is on call at the time and the issue or condition of the patient. “It is a medical decision,” Ayoub said. “There is no real financial incentive to put them in a helicopter. It’s about getting the patient the best care they can when they need it and where they need it.”

Destinations rely on the doctor’s decision or per the request of the patient.

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If the physician doesn't feel like it's a life or death situation, then a patient is transported via ambulance. If Holyoke's ambulances are tied up, MMH has good working relationships with area ambulance services that can get the job done.

The administrator was also quick to mention every transfer gets reviewed during monthly medical staff meetings. Time is set aside to review the appropriateness of transfers and patients that are staying in the hospital.

Any trauma incidents are reviewed by a trauma surgeon from North Colorado Medical Center. "They give us glowing marks for our standard of care through our ER," Ayoub said.

MMH was recently recertified and recredited for its level four trauma designation. The administrator said the trauma staff from the medical director on down to the ambulance crew deserve credit for the way things are run. "We've got a lot of great people," he noted.

"I think it's important to know that we do have this service," Ayoub said. "I think people's lives have been saved because we are able to fly folks out and get them to where they need to be as quickly as possible."

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