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14F – HELICOPTER EMS (HEMS) CONSIDERATIONS

EMERGENCY MEDICAL DISPATCHER
EMERGENCY MEDICAL RESPONDER
EMT
EMT-INTERMEDIATE 85
ADVANCED EMT
PARAMEDIC

Medical literature to date demonstrates no significant survival benefit utilizing medical helicopter transport for patients in densely populated, urban settings. The Medical Control Board and the University of Oklahoma Department of Emergency Medicine EMS Section provide the following information regarding the clinically appropriate utilization of medical helicopters to maximize patient benefit and protect the safety of patients, aeromedical professionals, and ground EMS professionals.

"No Fly" Patient Conditions
Medical helicopter utilization rarely affects outcome in already moribund patients or in the converse, stable patients without apparent serious illness/injury. A medical helicopter should NOT be utilized for the following patients:

1. Medical or Traumatic Cardiac Arrest without Return of Spontaneous Circulation;
2. Trauma Patients with minimal traumatic injury, without apparent risk of life/limb loss;
3. Patients with stable vital signs and without signs of serious illness/injury.

"No Fly" Zones
Medical helicopter utilization is very rarely indicated within an approximate 30 minute radius of an appropriate destination hospital unless there are extenuating circumstances. These "extenuating circumstances" include the following:

1. Hazardous or impassible road conditions resulting in significant ground transport delays for seriously injured or ill patients;
2. Multiple casualty incidents with high numbers of red/priority 1 patients, overwhelming available ground EMS units;
3. A combination of lengthy extrication and extended ground transportation (traffic conditions, weather conditions) of a priority 1 or priority 2 patient at the lead EMS professional's careful discretion.

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Medical Helicopter Utilization:

At incidents greater than 30 minutes from the appropriate destination hospital, the decision to activate a medical helicopter response should be based upon an EMS professional's assessment of the patient's clinical condition, factoring in apparent and/or suspected illness or injury, mechanisms of injury – if applicable, anticipated scene time, and anticipated ground transport time to an appropriate destination hospital (eg. cardiac catheterization capable hospital or trauma center). Medical helicopters should not be activated until an EMS professional or medically-trained law enforcement officer has assessed the patient. Further utilization concepts include:

1. EMS professionals on scene may elect to activate a medical helicopter if flight time to the incident, flight scene time, and return flight time would still allow a critical patient to arrive at an appropriate destination hospital significantly faster by air.
2. If ground EMS transport capability is not on scene and a decision is being factored as to ground or air transport, the on scene EMS professionals should first request an ETA for the ground transport unit. If the on scene EMS professionals then judge transport time by ground will be detrimental to the patient clinical condition, a medical helicopter response can be activated. This decision should be communicated to ground EMS agency to keep all responding apparatus crews aware of scene and patient dynamics.
3. If uncertain whether medical helicopter activation is in the best interest of the patient, contact OLMC at the anticipated destination hospital for consultation and determination of transport mode and destination.
4. The primary determinant of helicopter transport mode is to achieve getting the critical patient to the most appropriate definitive care hospital in the shortest amount of time. The medical helicopter to be utilized is the medical helicopter appropriate for the patient's needs and closest to the incident location.

Cancellation of Medical Helicopter Activation:

An EMS professional may cancel a medical helicopter response after being activated if patient condition significantly improves or deteriorates to meet "no fly" criteria. Keep in mind, though, that once a medical helicopter is responding to the scene, it is generally unwise to cancel that response. EMS professionals should avoid requesting a medical helicopter response, canceling the response, and then having to request the helicopter again. Such a situation prolongs scene time and helicopter response time in addition to conveying indecisive patient care.

Landing Zone:

Appropriate fire or law enforcement personnel will be responsible for establishing and maintaining a safe landing zone.

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Utilization Review:

All medical helicopter activations may undergo utilization review by the Chief Medical Officer and/or his/her designee and by the medical director of the aeromedical organization. This is to specifically promote optimal medical helicopter utilization and not to be interpreted as discouraging appropriate medical helicopter utilization per this protocol.