Improving EMS Delivery of Care

Emergency medical services (EMS) play a vital role in the United States health care system. Of the more than 136 million patient visits to emergency departments in 2011, nearly 16 million of those patients arrived by ambulance. During the triage, treatment and transport of these patients, the speed and quality of the services provided by EMS personnel can be the difference between life and death.

In this mobile environment, there is a routinely encountered clinical need to administer controlled substances, especially when treating patients who are having a seizure or are suffering from significant pain. In many cases, EMS personnel need to administer these lifesaving drugs as quickly as possible. The established practice of medicine allows appropriately trained EMS personnel to administer and deliver these controlled substances under a physician's supervision and medical direction, primarily through established guidelines and treatment protocols commonly known as "standing orders."

However, since the enactment of the Controlled Substances Act (CSA) in 1970, laws and regulations have not kept pace with the evolution of modern medicine. According to an interpretation of the CSA by the Department of Justice, standing orders are not compliant with the law. ACEP and other EMS stakeholders have been notified by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) that it intends to promulgate an EMS-specific rule. If this rule moves forward before a law can be enacted by Congress to explicitly allow the use of standing orders, then patients will lose access to these vital medications during the pre-hospital treatment and transport.

The "Protecting Patient Access to Emergency Medications Act" seeks to remedy this dilemma by protecting the use of standing orders and maintaining vigorous government oversight of storage protocols and physician oversight requirements.

Please contact ACEP's Congressional Affairs Director Brad Gruehn at bgruehn@acep.org or (202) 370-9297 for more information.

Co-sponsor the "Protecting Patient Access to Emergency Medications Act of 2016" (H.R. 4365/S.2932), sponsored by Rep. Richard Hudson (R-NC), Rep. G.K. Butterfield (D-NC) and Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA)