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MEMORANDUM

TO: Ohio EMS agencies, EMS medical directors, EMS providers, Ohio hospitals, and all associated emergency department and medical staff members

FROM: State of Ohio Emergency Medical, Fire, and Transportation Services Board

DATE: January 13, 2020

REFERENCE: Continuity of Patient Care and the Importance of Patient Handoff Procedures

The transfer of a patient from the prehospital environment to the hospital setting is a uniquely challenging and important crossroad in the continuum of patient care. Clear, prompt communication of clinically relevant information from EMS personnel to the receiving caregivers in emergency departments throughout Ohio helps ensure continued patient safety and seamless continuity of appropriate emergency care. The development and implementation of an effective patient handoff procedure is a shared responsibility of EMS and the receiving facility. Since 2013 and reaffirmed in 2018, the State Board of Emergency Medical, Fire, and Transportation Services (EMFTS Board) has communicated the importance of promptly sharing this critical information at the point of patient handoff during transfer of care for emergent patients (<https://www.ems.ohio.gov/links/position-papers/emsRunReportsPositionPaper.pdf>).

The EMFTS Board urges all Ohio EMS agencies and hospital emergency departments, together, to review their current patient handoff procedures. The proliferation of electronic run reports, many of which may not be completed until hours after an emergent patient has been delivered to the emergency department, has helped make the in-person exchange of vital, timely patient information in the emergency department more essential than ever.

While the importance of the prehospital/hospital handoff is imperative for care, please understand a universally accepted solitary approach to improving patient handoffs does not exist. Due to the variances in operational processes and resources, all protocols in regards to this facet of communication are best developed and integrated at the local level. Many agencies and facilities have already established a robust process for the handoff of patients that are successful in providing the facilities with a succinct report of the valuable information required for the next stage of care and the decisions based on the events and findings from the scene.

To that end, the Ohio Department of Public Safety, Division of EMS will be creating a repository on its website containing information and resources for EMS agencies and hospital facilities. In order to encourage collaboration and innovation, we have gathered sample handoff forms, research studies, guidance documents, and other resource materials at <https://www.ems.ohio.gov/critical.aspx#handoff>. We invite you to send us your forms, lessons learned, and success stories. We would like to add them to this growing collection of reference materials in order to help others. We hope these tools will stimulate discussion between agencies and hospitals that will ultimately lead to creative strategies for better serving our patients, EMS providers, and the local community. Together, we can discover new opportunities to improve patient care and enhance patient safety.