

**Attached is Additional Information for  
Agenda Item #3**

**Approval to Renew a Certificate of Public Convenience and  
Necessity to Air Methods to Provide Advanced and Basic Life  
Support Air Ambulance Services**

**Meeting of Tuesday, June 9, 2009**

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# Analysis of Helicopter Useage Since Leon County Base Closing

## Background

A medical helicopter program was first established in Leon County in 1985 by Tallahassee Memorial Hospital and service was provided at no cost to the citizens of Leon County until the hospital closed the program in 2004. At that time the Leon County Commission looked for ways to provide helicopter service and provided a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity to Air Methods Corporation to establish a helicopter base here in Leon County at no charge to the citizens. This program remained in place until January 30, 2009 when Air methods decided to close the Tallahassee base and provide helicopter services from other bases in other counties.

The helicopter based in Leon County by Air Methods was initially in competition with two other helicopters in Quincy and Perry which were owned by Corporate Jet which was acquired by Air Methods. This led to the closing of the Leon County base. The reason given for closing the Leon County base was to lower costs and to leave the helicopters "where the calls were". The Leon County helicopter averaged between 40-60 calls per month, of which 10-14 calls originated in Leon County. The average response time for the Leon County based helicopter was between 12-20 minutes.

In determining when to call a medical helicopter, Leon County EMS (LCEMS) uses many parameters to determine if helicopter transport is in the best interests of the patient. Response time to the scene, availability of appropriate and safe landing zones, patient condition, length of ground transport of the patient, helicopter load and unload times, and the time it takes a helicopter crew to get from the landing pad to the emergency room, among others are considered on each and every helicopter launch. With the loss of the helicopter responding from Leon County, response times were lengthened, so LCEMS and Dr. Landry revised the helicopter usage policy to reflect these response changes. In general, it takes one of the remaining helicopters between 25-35 minutes to get to most scenes within Leon County. The policy is now written so that crew members on scene should transport a patient by ground if by the time a patient is packaged and ready to go, no helicopter is seen or heard. In addition, the pilots that were based in Leon County had years of experience and knew Leon County very well and finding a location was never a problem in the past. With the usage of the helicopters from outside the county, the knowledge base of where to go does not exist and pilots are totally dependent on GIS technology to get to calls. This has resulted in location issues.

## Transition

The transition of losing the Leon County helicopter base has had many impacts on the operations relating to medical air transport. First is the loss of knowledge of pilots in Leon County. Next, there were radio problems with correct channels not being available for adequate communications with LCEMS. This has since been resolved. Also landing zone mapping was not adequately coordinated between all agencies. This has also been resolved. In addition, with only two helicopters in the region instead of the three here

previously, many times a helicopter is not available due to it already being in use or down for maintenance. This has impacted not only Leon County scene calls, but also the availability of air transport from both hospitals to other facilities. Finally, with the response time issue, it has become a rare event where helicopter transport is an advantage on scene calls within Leon County.

### **Current Situation**

Where Leon County was utilizing helicopter services between 10-14 times a month when a helicopter was here in the county, call volume for helicopter transport is down to an average of one patient per month. In April 2009 LCEMS called for helicopter transport seven times. Of these seven times, three times a helicopter was unavailable and three times the helicopter was canceled before arrival. Only one patient was transported by helicopter in April. In May there were only two requests for a helicopter with one cancellation and one transport.

### **Analysis**

The loss of the helicopter base in Leon County has not been beneficial to the EMS system or the citizens of Leon County. Utilization of a helicopter in most cases is not medically indicated now due to response times and helicopter availability. Patient care has not been compromised since LCEMS continues to provide a high level of care by ground transport, however the medical air transport component has diminished.