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Sponsor Spotlight: Priority Ambulance

Integration of EMS and hospital system is key to ambulance service success

When the first Baptist-branded ambulances rolled into Memphis on April 1, 2017, it was the culmination of months of work developing a unique, integrated system that would ultimately streamline processes and increase efficiencies in patient transfers throughout Baptist Memorial Health Care's 18 hospitals and six 9-1-1 service areas in Tennessee and Mississippi.

In March 2017 Baptist Memorial Health Care signed a master services agreement with Priority Ambulance to become the ambulance transport provider to the healthcare system and less than three weeks later, Priority Ambulance had mobilized the first 10 ambulances and more than 60 employees to serve Baptist's five medical facilities in the greater Memphis area. One year into the relationship, they have 31 vehicles and 300 ambulance employees providing medical transport to more than 30,000 patients each year at 12 Baptist Memorial Health Care facilities, and provides six communities with 9-1-1 service in Mississippi and West Tennessee.

"The integration of our ambulance services to one single provider for the majority of our facilities has been a positive move for our system," said Derick Ziegler, vice president of hospital and affiliate integration for Baptist Memorial Health Care. "Our system strategies were to improve the medical transport effectiveness and efficiency for our patients, integrate the patient transfer process and centralize dispatch communications, yielding overall improved transportation economics."

In 2016, Baptist and Priority Ambulance began discussions to define improvements for the movement of patients needing a higher level of care located at smaller regional locations across three states, with the ultimate goal of patient delivery at the right place at the right time, keeping the patient as close to home as possible. This partnership allowed Baptist to laser focus its attention on patient care and hospital operations while holding Priority Ambulance accountable for patient care and experience during transfers and medical transport.

"A significant advantage to having one ambulance service provider for the majority of all facilities is accountability," said Katie Morrisette, Baptist Memorial Health Care TeleHealth Administrator. "Our Market VPs for Operations meet weekly with Priority Ambulance and receive performance reports for all locations. With our integrated network, leaders are better able to identify trends and opportunities for expansion and improvement in our medical transport."

Another key goal of the implementation project was to leverage the vehicles for brand awareness in the region. To that end, Priority Ambulance created a new subsidiary, Baptist Ambulance, a member of the Priority family of companies that operates within ambulances under the Baptist name and logo.

A final goal was to improve patient flow efficiency through transportation. This was accomplished through the integration of Priority Ambulance's dispatch center into Baptist's bed management system/transfer center at the Patient Placement Center (PPC). The PPC is staffed with experienced registered nurses that track the status and manage all 2,700 hospital

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beds in the Baptist system and help transfer and admit patients—all from one location. In addition, nurses can assist with air launch for a critical case. This is accomplished via the TeleTracking Technology Transfer Center system. By co-locating its dispatch center in this facility, Priority Ambulance can add ambulance transport to the list of the PPC's capabilities, further enhancing and aligning all mission critical services for safe, effective patient care. Approximately 6,000 calls a month now route through the Priority-staffed ambulance dispatch center.

"We are constantly looking for ways that we can better integrate and partner with Baptist for the benefit of its patients," said Priority Ambulance CEO Bryan Gibson. "In our first year of service, we have built a strong foundation of efficient communication and partnership. Together, we can continue to grow our services, further enhance our performance and identify innovative new advances to continually raise the bar on medical transport for Baptist patients."

Additionally, through integration and better partnership, Priority Ambulance has been able to provide significant value adds to Baptist Memorial Health Care, including implementing ProQA technology and training in its dispatch system, implementing computer automated dispatch (CAD) systems in its 9-1-1 areas, and utilizing system status management and deployment strategy to improve on-time performance for Baptist hospitals and the communities served.

Future plans for the system include expanding Baptist's mobile eICU program to the ambulances. Experienced nurses and physicians are currently connected to surrounding facilities through telehealth links for consultations on patient care. These screens would also be linked to ambulances, so nurses and doctors could consult on patient care during transfer or while the patient is en route to their emergency department.