

Lack of Coordination Mars Efforts

Fourth of Six Articles

(There are no paramedics working for the ambulance service in Tippecanoe County. Of the six attendants with the service at the end of July, only three had completed training at the basic emergency medical technician level. The county isn't ready now for a paramedic program, but what has and is being done to lead us in this direction? Today's article looks into that question.)

By JOHN NORBERG
Staff Writer

Everyone involved with emergency medical services in Tippecanoe County thinks we should have paramedics on our ambulance service.

There will probably be disagreements along the way over just what these individuals should be allowed to do for a patient, but if the concept of ambulance service today is to begin medical care at the scene, physicians want well-trained people doing this.

"You care who services your car," says Rusty Deppert, former chairman of the Tippecanoe emergency medical services task force. "You should also care who services your body."

Mrs. Deppert doesn't think we're far away from having paramedics with the ambulance service.

"The potential is here," she says. "There's no reason why we shouldn't go ahead with it."

The step in this direction will have to come from the county commissioners, who sign the contract for ambulance service and establish what criteria must be met, and the County Council, which allocates the funds.

The emergency medical services task force has given the commissioners a long list of recommendations to improve ambulance coverage in Tippecanoe County. Little has been done with these recommendations, although a new contract will begin in January.

Charges made against Shipley's Ambulance Service since it began operating here could easily fill a book. They cover everything from stealing sheets to mishandling patients.

Some of these accusations have been based on investigation and fact. Some of them are generalizations. Some of them are based on lack of information.

There have been a number of efforts to improve ambulance service here, but often these efforts are clouded by disagreements, lack of coordination and mistrust.

Disagreements tend to be over what Shipley's Ambulance Service is doing and what it should be doing — whether he's providing as good a service as he can with the annual \$48,500 subsidy he receives, plus \$25 to \$30 charges for ambulance runs.

There is mutual mistrust between Fred Shipley, owner of the service, and many people involved in emergency medical care in Tippecanoe County.

The lack of coordination results from the number of people and organizations involved in ambulance service.

Police and firemen have spoken up about what they feel is wrong with the service, what they feel should be done. Mayors, health departments, and the County Commissioners have all criticized.

Where does ambulance service fit into Tippecanoe County? It is a part of the medical community as it provides a medical service. It must



work closer with Home and St. Elizabeth hospitals than any other organizations or institutions in the community.

These hospitals are both private and independent of one another — and to a certain degree competitive. Shipley's Ambulance Service is private and independent of both.

The ambulance service is connected with county government. It signs its contract with the county and that's where it gets its subsidy. But the contract with the county states the ambulance service must abide by all ordinances and city codes of Lafayette and West Lafayette. Therefore, the ambulance service is also tied to the city governments.

Yet at the same time, it's independent of all three. It's simply a private firm hired to do a service.

In the final analysis, the ambulance service must answer to the county government, the governments of Lafayette and West Lafayette — and if not legally by the contract, certainly ethically — to the medical community.

This leads to uncoordinated ef-

forts. All of these organizations and people don't work together.

An example of this is the pending effort on the part of the Lafayette Health Department to raise the minimum training standards of all ambulance attendants.

An ordinance to do this was filed with the city council in July. Because of the wording of that ordinance, and because it was specific, it would have put Shipley's out of operation in Lafayette immediately upon passage and would have prevented even physicians from serving as ambulance attendants to fill in the gap.

If the health department wanted to introduce an ordinance requiring a new level of first aid training for all policemen, the police chief would certainly have been notified beforehand.

Fred Shipley, learned of the training standard ordinance through the news media. That's also where Mrs. Deppert found out about it. Her committee had given the commissioners a recommendation for increasing the minimum training standards.

What developed was this: The Lafayette City Council was considering and holding hearings on training standards different from those set out in the City Code book when Shipley signed the contract, both of which were different from the training standards the county listed in the contract, all of which were different from the training standards recommended by the emergency medical services task force.

According to terms of the current contract, the West Lafayette City Council "could have begun consideration of ambulance attendant training standards different from all of these.

That ordinance in Lafayette was tabled for the second time on Aug. 5 after there was considerable confusion over it at a council caucus meeting several days before. The councilmen decided to talk the ordinance over with the county commissioners.

Another coordination problem occurred last spring when the Lafayette Health Department inspected the ambulance service and said it was substandard. Thirteen days later the county inspected the service and gave it good grades — even though some of the things the city complained about had not been corrected.

Accident scenes can also be less than organized. Because Shipley is not living up to his contract by supplying a rescue truck, the Lafayette Fire Department vehicle is primarily taking care of these missions everywhere in the county.

The men on the department's rescue squad claim they are better trained than the attendants with Shipley's Ambulance Service, and to

some extent, they are. The result is, when the rescue truck and the ambulance service are both at the scene of an accident, they will both treat a patient at the same time.

Later, firemen and ambulance attendants will each criticize the job done by the other.

In May, Mrs. Deppert recommended that the county commissioner establish a coordinator for ambulance service in Tippecanoe County. Nothing has come of that proposal. There are other proposals that a board be established — possibly with appointments from the two mayors and the county commissioners, to regulate, inspect and generally handle all the problems of ambulance service. Nothing has come of this.

In the middle of it all is Ered Shipley, an independent person. "I have my own set of rules — Fred Shipley's guidelines," he said in a recent interview. "And to me those are the only things that are important. I live by those rules. One of them is what my responsibility is, and my responsibility is to do the best job I can for my patients, within my means. As long as I complete that obligation, and see that my men do this, then that is my role as I see it, and nothing else is important to me."

Some people think he is completing those obligations "within his means." Others say he isn't. (See related stories on Page A-4.)

NEXT: Shipley's Ambulance Service — a look at training and accusations.