

Providing Emergency Medical Care & Transport Since 1986

Original to follow in U.S. Mail

August 22, 2013

Mr. Mark A. Refowitz Director, Orange County Health Care Agency 405 W. 5th Street, 7th floor Santa Ana, CA 92701

Dear Director Refowitz:

When our company, Lynch Ambulance, was invited by Dr. Sam Stratton, Orange County's Emergency Medical Services Medical Director, to facilitate the Interfacility Transport Advanced Life Support pilot program (IFT-ALS), we accepted with great honor and a sense of responsibility. We understood that this was a pilot program designed to provide data to policy makers so they could make an informed and educated decision about whether a change in Orange County's policies regarding medical transport was in the best interests of patients and the county's medical services as a whole. The pilot was undertaken in the continuation of centuries of medical tradition of utilizing trials, pilots, and other such programs to advance patient care by testing whether new procedures, devices, medications, and the like would yield better outcomes.

In our role as the provider of paramedic-based IFT-ALS transport services, our mission has been to keep our head down, run the transport calls for the pilot, and provide the data requested to OCEMS so that Dr. Stratton can make an informed decision about the underlying policy. As this pilot and the policy in question became "political" over the last few weeks and months, we chose to stay out of that discussion, and continue to do the job asked of us by the County – to provide good data to inform policy makers.

However, upon receipt of the most recent letter sent to you by the Orange County Professional Firefighters Association (OCPFA) attacking Dr. Stratton, our company, our highly trained and qualified medical staff including our paramedics, and effectively, attacking the very fundamental process of medical/clinical trials and pilots that have advanced the cause of patient care for centuries, we felt we could no longer sit silently. Frankly, the letter does a disservice not only to the professionals and processes they attack, but to the good name of the men and women of the firefighting services in our County that have all earned our respect.

It would, frankly, take too much of your valuable time to respond, line-by-line, to the falsehoods, misrepresentations, and misleading statements in the August 19, 2013 letter sent to you by the OCPFA. To ensure the validity of the pilot process itself, as well as defend the good name of our highly capable paramedics and other medical professionals, I felt it was important to clarify and correct many of the misleading statements of this letter to you directly.

<u>First and foremost, this is a pilot.</u> That cannot be stated enough times. The OCPFA letter repeatedly refers to the study underway as a change in policy, and this is simply not true. Dr. Stratton implemented the pilot to inform himself and other policy makers if a change in the current draft IFT-ALS policy would better serve patients. Dr. Stratton's authority to conduct such pilot programs is well-established in state law as well as in hundreds of years of advancement in patient care through clinical trials.

Second, the problem that a potential policy change seeks to address is very real. The current IFT-ALS practice in Orange County requires a critical care Registered Nurse, or fire service paramedics, to transport patients in need of ALS transport between facilities. In practice, due to California's ongoing nursing shortage (estimated in the tens of thousands) and the need for fire service paramedics to give top priority to 911 calls, the current process often leaves hospitals with patients in need of ALS transport services waiting for three to four hours, sometimes more, before a private ambulance with a critical care RN is available to transport them. This leads to patients with critical medical issues waiting on gurneys in hospital hallways, and to increased diversion periods in trauma centers closed because they simply cannot transport patients out of the hospitals. Changing the policy to address this problem is a question for policy makers – informed by the pilot – to make. To pretend as if there is not a problem worthy of studying possible solutions does no one any good. To read the OCPFA letter is to get the impression that all sorts of secret conspiracies and political deals are the motivation behind the pilot, and in fact, Dr. Stratton is seeking answers to a very real medical problem.

Third, the possible solution being explored by the pilot is not ground-breaking. In fact, every county in California besides Orange County, allows for some version of private paramedics participating in IFT-ALS transport services. Furthermore, here in Orange County, the cities of Newport Beach and Orange use a two paramedic model for their transport calls in their 911 system, which is the same staffing configuration of the IFT-P program. Again, of course, a thorough study via the pilot program is always warranted before making serious medical policy changes, which is why Dr. Stratton ordered the pilot. But to read the OCPFA letter, the reader would be left with the impression that utilizing private paramedics to perform these services is unworthy of even studying. In fact, the rest of California and all across the nation, private paramedics successfully perform these IFT-ALS transports on a daily basis.

Fourth, the implications of any impropriety in the selection of Lynch Ambulance as the pilot provider are simply false. Over the course of the two years members of my company have attended numerous publically held county meetings wherein Dr. Stratton has been openly discussing an IFT-ALS program here in Orange County. We sent a letter of interest to Dr. Stratton in the summer of 2012 expressing our interest. We are proud, in fact, to have provided this service to the County. To characterize the

selection of Lynch for this pilot as part of any political deal is absolutely false. Further, while we are only a small to medium sized, family-owned ambulance company here in Orange County, to characterize this pilot as some massive profit center for our company is not only information that the OCPFA simply could not have knowledge of, but is obviously false. So again, while we are proud to provide these services to the county we call home, to call a pilot program that represents less than three percent of our call volume a big profit center is completely misinformed.

A CONTRACTOR OF THE PARTY OF THE

Fifth, the allegations of decrease in patient care, and manipulation of data in the pilot, are absolutely not true. To read the OCPFA letter is to be left with the impression, no doubt intentionally, that there has been a clear decline in quality of patient care due to the pilot, and that Dr. Stratton and Lynch are manipulating the data to cover this up. Yet for the number of times the OCPFA makes this allegation or implication, one thing is missing...any actual evidence that this occurred. What their letter does seek to do is throw any allegation – not backed by any facts and occasionally with out-of-context statements – against the walls in hopes it will stick We are confident that we followed the protocols in effect at any given time as established and or clarified by Dr. Stratton. No examples of these supposed errors are provided, no evidence of the "large decrease in patient care" is provided, and the complaints about interaction between the IFT-ALS pilot and the 911 system are contradictory. It calls into the question the validity of the entire letter.

Sixth, and perhaps most importantly to me, to disparage the professionalism, education, and commitment to patient care of Lynch Ambulance paramedics is simply uncalled for. I know for a fact that we have some of the very best medical professionals in Orange County working at our company. Our average paramedic has two and a half years of on the job paramedic experience. We just hired two new paramedics with over ten year's field experience. Some of our senior paramedics are instructors at Saddleback College, where the fire service paramedics are trained. There are in fact fire service paramedics on duty today who were trained by Lynch Ambulance personnel. What's more, I know the apparent disdain for the private paramedics that runs throughout the OCPFA letter is not reflective of what the rank-and-file firefighter-paramedic thinks. I cannot tell you the number of cases where our personnel and fire service paramedics ended up working together to save lives and provide outstanding medical care to critically ill patients. My paramedics tell me of the great mutual respect and professional relationship they have with their fire service colleagues. It would disappoint many of our paramedics to know that the organization that seeks to speak for all firefighters holds them in such low regard but they would not hold it against the amazing rank-and-file fire service paramedics who serve Orange County, because that relationship would not be sullied by the obvious political nature of OCPFA's letter to you.

No one involved in medical care and policy making around medical care is so naïve as to think that politics will not sometimes rear its head. However, we can all seek to minimize these politics and let good medical decisions for patients be based on facts, not hyperbole and innuendo. It is not my place to speculate why the OCPFA feels so threatened by a simple pilot program, designed only to give policy makers adequate information upon which to make decisions that they would lash out with such an

outrageous letter to you. I hope you recognize that we understand the pilot for what it is. On behalf of the men and women of our company, from me on down to our paramedics, dispatchers, and everyone involved in our family-owned, local business, we are proud to participate in providing data and helping inform you, other medical policy makers, and Dr. Stratton about how to best provide quality care and medical transport services to those in need here in Orange County.

I would of course be happy to answer any additional questions you may have about our company, the training and quality of paramedics, and our role in this pilot.

Sincerely,

Walt J. Lynch

CEO, Lynch Ambulance

Cc:

Board of Supervisors

Dr. Sam Stratton
EMCC Members