

PROVINCIAL MARKET SUPPLEMENT PROGRAM

**Report of the Market Supplement Review
Committee**

Emergency Medical Dispatcher

Final Report

August 6, 2002

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the Saskatchewan Market Supplement Program is to ensure that Saskatchewan health care employers can attract and retain the employees required to provide appropriate health care services to the people of Saskatchewan.

This program is designed to address specific skill shortages by use of a temporary market supplement to attract and/or retain qualified employees. The program is designed to ensure that temporary market supplements respond to valid labour market criteria to address recruitment/retention pressures.

A temporary market supplement will be an acceptable option only if:

- a) workplace initiatives have not addressed the skill shortage;
- b) labour market data supports a supplement; and,
- c) recruitment/retention is a problem, is affecting service delivery and is well documented.

This report deals with the Market Supplement Review Committee's analysis of the recruitment/retention pressures facing employers with respect to Emergency Medical Dispatchers.

OVERVIEW

The Market Supplement Review Committee reviewed documentation included in the request for consideration of a market supplement for Emergency Medical Dispatchers (EMD). One employer reported that they employ Emergency Medical Dispatcher (EMD) in their Health District for the purpose of this report. This employer reports vacancies for the EMD's.

Role of a Emergency Medical Dispatcher:

The EMS Communication Centre plays a critical role in Emergency Medical Service (EMS) coordination, response and early intervention.

The Emergency Medical Dispatcher (EMD) is responsible for ensuring System Status Management by strategically moving ambulances geographically to ensure system-wide coverage to maintain minimal response time. The medical aspect of the EMD is also critical for positive outcomes. The EMD triages calls by severity and provides initial critical interventions through the caller. They provide clear step-by-step instructions, reassurance and psychological support.

Information regarding budgeted positions and vacancies is provided in the following table:

Emergency Medical Dispatcher – Table 1

Districts	Number of Budgeted Positions (June, 2002)		Number of Vacant Budgeted Positions (June, 2002)		% Vacancy	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
Regina Health District	11	1	3	0	27.2%	
TOTAL	11	1	3	0	27.2%	

ANALYSIS

The MSRC discussed the Labour Market Criteria as guided by the Provincial Market Supplement Program framework.

SERVICE DELIVERY IMPACTS: *(Employers were asked to provide information that addresses current service delivery impacts resulting from staff shortages, potential staff short term service delivery impacts, potential long term service delivery impacts and options for alternative service delivery models).*

The geographic area that this classification covers for the Regina Health District has increased by nearly 700%. The area now includes the following Health Districts: Moose Mountain, South East, South Central, South West, Rolling Hills and, Swift Current. Also, the District is providing communication, coordination and dispatch for 45 First Responder Teams, 41 Fire Departments and 33 Ambulance services. The employer is not currently staffed to capacity thus increasing the potential risk for error and substantial use of overtime to cover shifts.

Overtime has been utilized extensively by this employer. In 2001, a total of 23,361 person hours were worked in the EMS Communications Centre, of which 4,526 hours were over-time (19%).

VACANCY RATE ANALYSIS: *(Employers were requested to provide information about the frequency and timing of vacancy occurrences {i.e., seasonal vacancies; do the vacancies always follow an event; etc.} and to identify trends that may affect recruitment/retention efforts).*

It was noted by the employer that there are 3 full-time vacancies at present. This represents a vacancy rate of 27.2% for permanent full-time positions (see Table 1).

The length of vacancy is approximately 3 to 6 months for EMD's.

Many new EMD's become frustrated with wages, workload, and physical workspace and begin looking elsewhere within 6 months of employment.

Due to the technical requirement of the job, a number of candidates do not pass probation. EMD's must possess above average multi-tasking skills, communication skills and critical thinking skills.

As City Police and Fire Departments across Saskatchewan hire, there tends to be a corresponding number of EMD resignations. The qualifications for the EMD are very similar as those for the Police, Fire and EMS communication centres across Western Canada.

TURNOVER RATES: *(Employers were asked to provide local analysis of reasons for leaving and trends that may be emerging. They were also asked to provide annual turnover {loss of employees to other competitor employers} ratio to the existing staff complement {budgeted positions} in the given occupation.).*

The turnover rate for 2001 – 2002 is 36% i.e. 4 of 11 positions. Over the past 2 years, the District has lost 5 FTE's (45%), and 3 OTFT EMD's.

According to exit interviews, the most common reason for leaving is because of the wage disparity between other provinces and other professions i.e. Police and Fire Department. Other reasons that employees choose to leave include lack of career path and the physical environment (these are distant second and third to wage disparity).

WORKPLACE INITIATIVES: *(Employers were asked to identify workplace initiatives undertaken to address staff shortages, i.e., workload, job redesign, local joint union/management processes, health & safety, etc.).*

Workplace initiatives have included:

- New orientation and in-servicing policies which are more comprehensive
- More flexibility in the scheduling of shifts (difficult when a staff shortage exists)
- Employee recognition projects, team building and communication plan
- Attempt to enhance the physical facilities to better meet the needs of the program and staff i.e. purchase high tech communication equipment when possible
- Creating internal career path opportunities such as Communication Team Leaders.
- Attempt to create more educational opportunities

RECRUITMENT ISSUE ANALYSIS: *(Employers were asked to provide information such as length of recruitment times, training investments, licensing issues, supply and demand issues, etc., as well as information that would identify trends that may affect recruitment and/or retention efforts).*

Recruitment activities have included:

- Advertising via mailouts, internet, and Regina and Saskatoon newspapers
- Visits to technical schools
- Encouraging emergency communication technology students to come to Regina for practicum placements

Historically, this employer has drawn the majority of candidates from the Cypress Hills College program and, other customer service institutions by practicum placements and word of mouth.

The demographics of the EMS professions suggest a young employee profile. Thus, most EMS professionals are very mobile and able to change employment because of the higher paying positions with the competitors.

SALARY MARKET CONDITIONS: *(Employers were asked to identify situations where their salary levels are lower than other employers that they would expect to recruit employees from or other employers that recruit their employees. This may be local, provincial, regional, national or international depending on the occupation group and traditional recruitment relationships. Cost of living considerations may or may not be appropriate to factor into market salary comparisons).*

A comparison to other employers with the same position;

- Winnipeg EMS is 25% higher
- The industry average in Saskatchewan (which includes Regina Fire and Police Services) is approximately 19% higher at the top rate

The qualifications for these positions are very similar i.e. Grade XII, typing speed of 35 wpm, computer literacy, verbal and written communication skills, and certification in EMD (EMD certification only required for EMD's).

AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES: *(The magnitude and timing of any market adjustment will be subject to the availability of existing resources. Please make any comments as to the impact of addressing this staff shortage if resources are not available in the short term).*

With the Communications Centre taking on more responsibility, overtime will continue to increase. The potential risk of error increases substantially, especially not having at least one experienced EMD on each shift. The employer reports that the number of vacancies will worsen as EMD's become tired of overtime and heavy workloads.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

Considering all the market labour criteria under the provincial framework, the Market Supplement Review Committee makes the following conclusions:

1. The employer who employs EMD's has experienced a significant increase to the geographic size of the area to be covered by their EMS. Although significant recruiting efforts have been made, an inadequate number of staff have been recruited to fill the increased positions now available. Relying on existing staff to continue working significant overtime increases the potential risk of dispatch error.
2. Although there is only 1 Health District that employs EMD's in the province, there is a high vacancy rate at 27.2%. This employer noted that whenever the local Fire and Police Departments hire, the vacancy rate becomes higher indicating that there are market salary issues also. During the past 2 years, there has been a 45% turnover rate for EMD's.
3. The Committee has recognized that the employer has made effort in attempting to enhance the attractiveness of the EMS workplace. Examples include; improving the new employee orientation and in-servicing policies, flexible shifts (when appropriate), improving the physical facilities to better meet the program needs, and, offering employee recognition programs, team building and communication plans. These initiatives have met with some (but limited) success.

Having reviewed the employer information and considering all the labour market criteria defined by the market supplement framework, the Market Supplement Review Committee recommends:

1. A temporary market supplement for the Emergency Medical Dispatcher classification be implemented.

APPENDIX A

Market Supplement Consideration Request – Emergency Medical Dispatcher

Employer Respondents

1. Regina Health District