

June 20, 2001

Mr. Robert N. Rapolla

Re: Notice of Summary Suspension: EMT-Basic Certification  
Investigation Control #01-C-044

Dear Mr. Rapolla:

The New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services is vested with the responsibility of carrying out the provisions of the Health Care Facilities Planning Act, N.J.S.A. 26:2H-1, et seq., which was enacted, in part, to ensure that all hospital and related health care services rendered in the State of New Jersey are of the highest quality. As defined at N.J.S.A. 26:2H-2b, health care services include any pre-hospital care rendered by basic life support providers. In furtherance of the objectives set forth in the statute, the Department of Health and Senior Services has adopted regulations that govern the licensing of basic life support ambulances, as well as the training, certification and professional conduct of EMT-Basics, such as yourself, who staff those ambulances. See, N.J.A.C. 8:40-1.1, et seq. and 8:40A-1.1, et seq.

On June 14, 2001 staff of this Department's Office of Emergency Medical Services (OEMS) was made aware of an incident that took place on June 9, 2001. The facts as I understand them are as follows: On June 9, 2001 at approximately 4:00 a.m., you and your partner, EMT-Basic Mr. Robert Hutchinson of Trenton Emergency Medical Services, responded to 490 West Hanover Street in Trenton, New Jersey to assist a patient who was actively seizing. Upon arrival at the scene, you and EMT Hutchinson were presented with an unconscious 32-year-old male who appeared to be in respiratory distress. According to the patient care report prepared by you and EMT Hutchinson, the events unfolded as follows: Initially, the patient did not respond to verbal stimuli. You and EMT Hutchinson proceeded to roll the patient onto his back and attempted to arouse the patient with loud verbal stimuli, to which he ultimately responded. However, upon regaining consciousness, the patient became extremely combative, kicking at you and your partner with both legs, as well as striking EMT Hutchinson in the chest with his fist and kicking you in the groin. The patient continued his combative behavior, apparently head-butting the wall, the headboard and you and EMT Hutchinson several times.

It was at this point that EMT-Paramedics Mr. Gregory Mikula and Ms. Marguerite Johnson arrived on the scene. Again, according to the patient care report prepared by you and EMT Hutchinson, Medic Mikula observed what was happening and radioed for assistance from the Trenton Police Department. Medic Mikula then attempted to help subdue the patient, while Medic Johnson returned to the MICU to obtain cravats to be utilized to restrain the patient. In all, it appears that there were approximately five EMS crewmembers attempting to restrain the patient when officers from the Trenton Police Department arrived on the scene.

This is consistent with the observations made by EMT-Paramedic Mr. Kenneth Guy, who arrived on the scene shortly after the arrival of Medics Mikula and Johnson. According to one of Medic Guy's two written statements dated June 9, 2001, several EMS crewmembers were attempting to restrain the patient, who was face down on the bed at that time. Medic Guy's partner, MICN Mr. Peter Schroeder was at the patient's head, holding his neck and head with both hands. You and EMT Hutchinson were on the patient's back attempting to control the patient's arms. Medic Guy's other partner, EMT-Basic Mr. Vito Vacirca was at the patient's feet attempting to restrain his legs while Medic Johnson attempted to tie them with the cravat, and Medic Mikula was standing on the patient's thighs with his hands pressed to the ceiling. Medic Guy then handed the cravats to Medic Johnson, at which time he observed Medic Mikula kicking the patient in the leg. He states that he made eye contact with Medic Mikula, at which point he stopped. Medic Guy goes on to state that the police arrived on the scene several minutes after that, at which point he requested that the patient be handcuffed.

Once again, according to the patient care report prepared by you and EMT Hutchinson, the patient was subsequently handcuffed and was placed on a Reeves® stretcher. The patient continued to flail his body and rolled face down on the stretcher. The crew decided to transport the patient to the ambulance in the face down position while protecting the patient's airway. The patient was then carried to the ambulance, all the while continuing to flail about. Once in the ambulance, Medic Mikula and EMT Hutchinson attempted to complete a patient assessment. The patient was placed on his back, and it was determined that his airway was not obstructed and that he had radial pulses. However, the patient remained combative and eventually became apneic. At that point, Medic Mikula began to assist with ventilation utilizing a bag-valve-mask and then intubated the patient. The patient was then placed on a monitor and was transported to the Emergency Department at Capital Health System - Fuld Campus.

According to records thus far obtained from Capital Health System - Fuld Campus, when the patient arrived at the Emergency Department, he was unresponsive with ecchymosis and swelling of both shoulders, he had petechiae around his eyes and head, a subconjunctival hemorrhage of both eyes, ecchymosis and swelling of the right forearm, contusions to the forehead, upper lips and tongue margin, ecchymosis around the base of the neck, ecchymosis and swelling of clavicles and circumferential abrasions and lacerations of both wrists. The patient was ultimately admitted to the hospital, where he died on June 13, 2001. Although a report has been prepared by the Medical Examiner, as of this time staff of this Department has not received a copy of that report. Please be assured that the Medical Examiner's report, along with the patient care reports prepared by Trenton Emergency Medical Services and Capital Health System and the patient's hospital records shall be reviewed as part of this Department's full investigation into this matter.

As the agency responsible for certifying EMT-Basics, it is this Department's obligation to ensure the health and safety of the public with whom you may come into contact. If there is any justifiable reason for this Department to believe that your continued certification as

an EMT-Basic poses a threat to the public health and safety, it is our obligation to initiate proceedings for the immediate suspension of that certification. Specifically, N.J.A.C. 8:40A-9.5(c), in relevant part, states:

"The Commissioner or his or her designee may summarily suspend an EMT certification where the continued certification of an individual poses an immediate threat to the health, safety or welfare of the public."

Based on the knowledge and information that I have at this time, and in accordance with the intent of N.J.A.C. 8:40A-9.5(c), I believe that it is in the best interest of the public health, safety and welfare to summarily suspend your certification at this time. Therefore, please be advised that your certification as an EMT-Basic is immediately suspended, and shall remain suspended pending the outcome of OEMS's investigation into this matter. That said, please be advised that you may not, under any circumstances, act in the capacity of or perform the duties of an EMT-Basic with Trenton Emergency Medical Services or any other basic life support provider in New Jersey during this period of suspension. You will be notified when OEMS has completed its investigation into this matter, at which time you will be advised what action(s), if any, will be taken with respect to your EMT-Basic certification. Pursuant to N.J.A.C. 8:40A-9.5(c), you are entitled to appeal to the Commissioner of Health and Senior Services for an expedited hearing before the Office of Administrative Law to contest this summary suspension. If the summary suspension is upheld at the Office of Administrative Law, you have the right to apply for injunctive relief in the Superior Court of New Jersey. Your request for an expedited hearing on this matter must be submitted in writing and must be accompanied by a response to the charges contained herein. Please include the control number noted above (i.e., #01-C-044) on your correspondence, and forward your request to:

New Jersey Department of Health & Senior Services  
Office of Legal & Regulatory Affairs  
P.O. Box 360, Room 805  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0360  
Attn: Mrs. Carole Slimm

If you have any questions concerning this matter, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Darcy Saunders of my office at (609) 633-7777.

Sincerely,

Susan Way  
Director

Office of Emergency Medical Services

c: Mr. Ralph Gumbert, Director  
Trenton Emergency Medical Services  
Ms. Peg Trimble, Director  
Pennsylvania Dept. of Health - EMS  
National Registry of EMTs  
Mrs. Slimm, L&RA  
Ms. Barreto, DAG  
Ms. Halupke, OEMS  
Mr. Dinetz, OEMS  
Mr. Mondoro, OEMS  
Mr. Carter, OEMS  
Mr. McSweeney, OEMS  
Ms. Saunders, OEMS

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