



**Summary of Proceedings
Public Hearing**

held on Wednesday January 9th, 2019 from 10:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

Subject Matter: Inquiry into the Efficiency and Effectiveness of the National Emergency Ambulance Service

Objectives of the Inquiry

The objectives of the inquiry are as follows:

- To assess the capacity of the National Emergency Ambulance Services in Trinidad and Tobago;
- To understand how the resources associated with this service are deployed throughout the country;
- To determine areas of inefficiency in the service and the critical factors/conditions which are required for its success.

Venue: J. Hamilton Maurice Room, Mezzanine Floor, Office of the Parliament, Tower D, the Port of Spain International Waterfront Centre, 1A Wrightson Road, Port-of-Spain.

Committee Members

The following Members were present:

- i. Dr. Varma Deyalsingh - Chairman
- ii. Mrs. Ramona Ramdial - Vice-Chairman
- iii. Mr. Nigel De Freitas
- iv. Mr. Darryl Smith
- v. Mrs. Jennifer Baptiste-Primus
- vi. Mr. Esmond Forde
- vii. Ms. Khadijah Ameen

Witnesses Who Appeared

The following officials of the **Tobago Regional Health Authority (TRHA)** appeared before the Committee:

- Ms. Ingrid Melville Chairman, Board of Directors
- Ms. Michelle Edwards-Benjamin Chief Executive Officer (Ag.)
- Mr. Lester Frederick TEMS Manager

The following officials of **the Division of Health, Wellness and Family Development (THA)** appeared before the Committee:

- Dr. Agatha Carrington Secretary
- Mrs. Dianne Baker-Henry Administrator

Key Issues Discussed

The following are the main issues highlighted during discussions with the **Tobago Regional Health Authority (TRHA)**:

1. After an initial purchase of 10 ambulances in 2015, there are currently 8 functioning ambulances to service the 6 bases in Tobago;
2. Two ambulances are currently being serviced and should be functional by the first quarter of 2015;
3. Ambulances have been reserved to serve during periods of high tourist arrivals, for example for the arrival of cruise ships;
4. The total fleet of ambulances is 18, however, 8 ambulances are currently in the process of being disposed;
5. Population density is a determining factor in the distribution of ambulances;
6. Ambulances are deployed based on demand, however, economic constraints have reduced the TRHA's ability to procure more ambulances to service Tobago;
7. A long-term plan of the TRHA is to procure ambulances that have the capability of traversing difficult terrain;
8. A significant challenge posed is the difficulty associated with moving heavy persons to the ambulances in difficult terrain;
9. The average life span of an ambulance is 5 years, however, ambulances with proper maintenance would be used for a longer time;
10. A cost-benefit analysis for the ambulances within the TRHA is still outstanding;
11. In crucial situations in far locations, another ambulance may be deployed to assist;

12. The Accident and Emergency Room of the Scarborough hospital had approximately 9000 visits per annum inclusive of hand-overs and walk-ins;
13. 14 ambulances may be ideal to service Tobago, with two ambulances per base, specifically in the North and Eastern region;
14. There are currently 8 Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) per base with 2 EMTs rostered per 12 hour shift;
15. The monthly salary of an EMT ranges from \$12000 to \$15000;
16. Nurses are not assigned to work with EMTs on the ambulances;
17. The licence of the medical director within TEMA covers training for EMTs in Basic Life support;
18. EMTs have received training in the administration of medicine, however, IV training has not been provided;
19. As part of its customer service responsibility, the TRHA, upon written request, provides pro bono ambulances services for private events;
20. Discussions are underway with VMCOTT to ascertain whether inspections are necessary for the current fleet of ambulances;
21. The process for procuring parts for treat with mechanical issues affecting 2 ambulances has commenced;
22. The process of handing over a patient at the Scarborough General Hospital can take approximately 10 minutes. The process involves informing the Accident and Emergency Unit of the arrival time and the condition of the incoming patients. After which the patient is handed over to the Head nurse and placed in an available bed;
23. The THRA assumes responsibility for the medical care of a patient when the patient is placed in an ambulance;
24. There is a perception in Tobago that a patient would receive faster medical attention if they arrive at a public health facility in an ambulance. This has led to abuse of the ambulance service;
25. No practical deterrents are currently in place to reduce the abuse of the ambulance service, although callers are subjected to triage screening;
26. Public education drives are to be conducted to reduce this abuse;
27. The evaluation of the performance of the Tobago Emergency Ambulance Service is being conducted through customer surveys;
28. The areas of the TRHA's administrative reporting system that can be improved are in the areas of audit and compliance;
29. The TRHA is working towards receiving accreditation for service manuals, policies, procedures;
30. A preventative maintenance system does not exist with service providers and should be implemented by the first quarter of 2019. Corrective maintenance is being used currently;

31. The TRHA has a close working relationship with TEMA. TEMA is part of the Disaster Management Plan in Tobago where TRHA is first responders;
32. The TRHA is improving accountability through the implementation of a Performance Management System which will be applied to all levels of staff;
33. Tobago Emergency Management Authority (TEMA) does not own or operate ambulances;
34. The Audit and Compliance Committee is a sub-committee of the Board that monitors service delivery and compliance with internal controls;
35. The Audit and Compliance Committee reports to the Board, and then to the TRHA. In turn, the TRHA is accountable to the Division of Health, Wellness and Family Development;
36. Ambulances are equipped with basic equipment as outlined by the Act;
37. The TRHA responds to emergencies at the airport although there is a Red Cross ambulance stationed there;
38. There is a need for an improved relationship with the ANR Robinson Airport in Tobago;
39. An ambulette service will add value to Tobago's public health care system. However this service is not analogous to an Emergency Ambulance Service as the vehicles are not equipped with medical equipment but is specifically for transporting patients between health facilities;
40. Patient Material and Transport is stationed at the Scarborough General Hospital in Tobago however, one may not be adequate;
41. Persons who are authorised to be on the ambulance are covered under the vehicle's insurance;
42. Insurance coverage has been extended to the staff of the TRHA;
43. Helipads exist at the Scarborough General Hospital and can facilitate helicopter travel through the National Helicopter Service;
44. The TRHA has an Employee Assistant Programme (EAP) system for its staff;
45. Psychologists are also on staff to deal with psychological issues associated with this job;
46. The TRHA has a pre-approved list of suppliers of ambulances which was reconstituted over the last fiscal period. However, Tobago suppliers are often preferred when procuring supplies and services for the EMS.
47. The arrangements for the disposal of assets are in sync with the new Public Procurement legislation;
48. TEMS collaborated with TEMA in the implementation of an evacuation plan;
49. An after action review of the evacuation plan is conducted by TEMA; and
50. Zello is an app developed to contact first-responders to assist in disaster relief.

The following are the main issues highlighted during discussions with **the Division of Health, Wellness and Family Development (THA)**:

1. There have been challenges in the maintenance arrangements for ambulances, however, an MOU was drafted with VMCOTT;

2. The Division has stated that the replacement of ambulances is being conducted on a phased basis;
3. Due to the current financial constraints facing the THA the TRHA is unable to increase the fleet to 18 ambulances;
4. Citizens may convey their complaints/concerns on the TRHA's website as well as the customer feedback service at the health centres and hospitals;
5. Community outreach meetings are also conducted to measure customer satisfaction with the ambulance service;
6. Public-private partnership for the national ambulance service is being considered; and
7. In the first week of the month, releases are received from the Central Government and disbursed.

The hearing can be viewed on our YouTube channel via the following link: <https://youtu.be/hGxH-QXwR7U>

Contact the Committee's Secretary

You may contact the Committee's Secretary at jsclasasc@ttparliament.org or 624-7275 Ext. [2277/2627/2282](tel:227726272282)

*Committees Unit
January 18, 2019*