



Introduction to Whatcom County EMS Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

The Whatcom County EMS and Trauma Care Council (WCEMSTCC) has developed a plan in accordance with Washington State guidelines ([WAC 246-50-020](#)) to articulate the process that is used to monitor, improve, and address challenges in the quality of pre-hospital patient care in Whatcom County. The body that will implement those guidelines is the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Committee. The Committee is made up of representatives from the responding pre-hospital agencies of Whatcom County and municipalities, private organizations involved in local EMS, St. Joseph Hospital, Prospect dispatch services, Mt. Baker Ski Area, and the Whatcom County MPD. The make-up of the committee is designed to ensure that all stakeholders in the continuum of patient care are represented and have input into CQI efforts. The primary goal of the Committee is to assist agencies that care for, transport, and receive patients in need of emergency treatment, for the best possible outcomes for all citizens and visitors of Whatcom County.

Committee Structure

The committee leadership is made up of four officers. The MPD is a permanent officer, and holds the position of Co-Chairperson. The other three positions are elected by the committee, each with two-year terms. The other Co-Chairperson will serve an initial one year term in order to stagger the appointment of new officers. The Co-Chairpersons act as the liaisons between the EMS agencies and the rest of the medical community, and report committee activities to the WCEMSTCC. The other two positions are the EMS Quality Coordinator, responsible for gathering the data to be reviewed, and a Committee Secretary, responsible for organizing and disseminating information regarding committee initiatives and decisions.

The CQI Plan

Continuous Quality Improvement is a concept derived from a philosophy that focuses on processes rather than on individuals. It contends that improvements can be made in most areas in the continuum of patient care. This is an educational process that is not designed to be punitive, but rather examines ways to improve the delivery of patient care through research of new techniques and technologies. This goal is achieved through ongoing assessment of clinical care, published research, evidence-based implementation of initiatives, and outcomes associated with the implemented changes. The CQI Committee works closely with the Education Committee of the WCEMSTCC to identify and implement new initiatives. The committee will review special cases and issues that have been submitted for evaluation, either from an agency member, a representative within the CQI Committee, or an outside agency requesting clarification.

Therefore, in order for the CQI process to function at its most effective level, it requires regular participation from those stakeholders involved in pre-hospital care in Whatcom County. All members in the pre-hospital community have a right and a responsibility to bring forward their concerns and/or ideas for evaluation. This can be accomplished by bringing issues directly to the CQI Committee or to your agency's committee representative, who in turn will bring issues to the committee for investigation. The success of the CQI effort depends on your participation.



In addition, one of the duties of the committee is to utilize the scientific process to evaluate if the current standard of care for a particular medical condition (such as CVA) is the most effective medical practice in our system. Some subjects may be evaluated for lengthy periods of time, gathering data from patient care and transports, and assessing whether the current practice needs to be modified to more closely represent trends in better patient care. Areas of review may include, but are not limited to:

- Any clinical care issue or public complaint
- Variations from protocol/standard of care
- Deviations from scope of practice
- Medication errors
- Complications of airway management
- Issues with outstanding educational potential
- Delivery of exceptional patient care resulting in opportunity to implement new concepts

Outline of Provider Agency Responsibilities related to CQI:

1. Designate personnel who manage the internal quality improvement process for that agency. The pre-hospital agency representative is responsible for internal CQI processes related to personnel, equipment and supplies, safety, skills maintenance, and competency.
2. In cooperation with the Whatcom EMS Council, implement an internal CQI Plan and with the assistance of the CQI committee provide education to all personnel within the agency regarding CQI responsibilities.
3. Assist in the identification of new issues/clinical indicators, and ensure agency compliance with the county CQI plan.
4. Share a summary of results from internal CQI activities with the CQI committee, as well as disseminate appropriate information forwarded from the CQI committee to all EMS personnel within the agency.
5. Maintain records of CQI activities for review and action regarding exemplary practice, unanticipated events, and utilization management. (See EMS/ED Event Report form and Clinical Indicator reporting tool, below.)
6. Review internal CQI efforts regularly for effectiveness in identifying and resolving provider related CQI issues, and revise as needed.

Summary

The concept of this committee is to provide a voice for those members of the pre-hospital community to introduce new ideas, new educational opportunities, and to fill the information void that limits the ability of members to benefit from the education this county's excellent pre-hospital care program can provide. This committee has been established to provide an avenue for making needed improvements in our already exceptional system, for we all know we can do better. With your help, the CQI Committee has the ability to meet the evolving needs of patients and care providers in Whatcom County.