



## ADVISORY NOTICE

No. 11-001

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**SUBJECT:** Online medical control

**ISSUED:** March 18, 2011

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The purpose of the advisory notice is to clarify the role of online medical control physicians relative to the *Rhode Island Prehospital Care Protocols and Standing Orders*. The information contained in this notice is supplementary to that outlined in the *Protocols* and the *Rules and Regulations Relating to EMS*. Please note that the information in this document does not represent any change in policy, but rather a reiteration and clarification of principles long-standing in Rhode Island's EMS system.

### Background

The role of physicians in EMS systems varies from one state to another. In Rhode Island, EMS providers' authorization to practice is established by statute, based on an EMT license issued by the Rhode Island Department of Health. This differs from some states, where an EMT may practice under the license and authority of his/her service's physician Medical Director.

In Rhode Island, Medical Control refers to the real-time, "online" role of an emergency department physician at a receiving hospital. The Medical Control physician's role is separate and apart that of a service's Medical Director, who typically provides offline quality assurance and oversight to the EMS providers working within the service. The Medical Director does not have the authority to issue "standing orders," although, if present, he/she may function as on-scene Medical Control as described in the *Medical Control at the Emergency Scene* protocol.

### Authority of the Medical Control Physician

An online Medical Control physician *may*:

- Provide guidance to an EMT working in the field relative to evaluation and treatment of a given patient based on the *RI Prehospital Care Protocols and Standing Orders*;
- Authorize an EMT to perform specific interventions for a given patient where the *Protocols* indicate "with permission from Medical Control" (or equivalent statement);
- Authorize an EMT to omit specific interventions for a given patient, or perform them in a different order, so long as those interventions are within the EMT's Rhode Island scope-of-practice and training.

An online Medical Control physician *cannot*:

- Authorize an EMT to perform interventions that are outside the EMT's Rhode Island scope-of-practice (for example, a Medical Control physician may not direct an EMT-Cardiac to perform a Cricothyrotomy, because that skill is not in the EMT-Cardiac scope-of-practice, regardless of any training an individual may have received);
- Authorize an EMT to perform interventions that contradict the *Protocols* (for example, a Medical Control physician has no authority to direct an EMT to utilize sedative medications for the purpose of endotracheal intubation, because such use of sedatives is not provided for in the *Protocols*.)

### Conclusion

All Rhode Island EMS providers are responsible for familiarity with their own scope-of-practice, and would be held accountable for exceeding that scope, regardless of directions given them by an online Medical Control physician. Medical Control physicians are likewise responsible for familiarity with the scope-of-practice for each Rhode Island EMT level, as established by the *RI Prehospital Care Protocols and Standing Orders*.