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Med Transport offers service

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North Powder man proposes providing interfacility transports for nonemergencies

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A new ambulance service is vying to provide nonemergent interfacility transport in Baker County to out-of-area hospitals.

At Wednesday's Baker County Commission meeting, Chris Arvidson, owner of Med Transport Inc., based in North Powder, asked if the Commission would write him a letter of support by the end of the week that would allow him to provide nonemergent medical transportation in Baker County.

He does not intend to provide emergency ambulance services in the county.

Commissioner Bill Harvey asked if Arvidson had the proper licensing and certification to provide the services to Baker County.

"I don't have copies with me but I am operating in other counties and have been transporting patients," Arvidson said. "I can get you those licenses."

He said he has a state ambulance service license and has two certified ambulances.

Baker City Fire Department (BCFD) handles emergency calls for most of the county (ambulance service area or ASA) along with Pine Valley and Eagle Valley Rural Fire Departments.

BCFD also provides nonemergent transport.

Arvidson said Air St. Luke's provides medical transport in Baker County but that service doesn't have an agreement to be part of the local ASA (Baker County) as required by state law.

Commissioner Tim Kerns asked what the requirements were for Arvidson to be included in the local ASA to be able to provide his services.

Arvidson said that state statutes say that ASAs can have more than one nonemergent provider.

County governments are responsible for establishing ambulance plans and ASAs and their regulation. Baker City Fire (along with the previously mentioned departments) is the ambulance provider for the county in its plan.

"(ASAs are required to have) pre-arranged nonemergent transfers and interfacility transfers. That is one of the elements the state requires," Arvidson read from what he said was a copy of Oregon Revised Statutes concerning ambulance services. "You can probably ask (County Fire Manager) Gary Timm if Baker City is set up as a nonemergent transfer or interfacility transfer in this ASA. He can also tell you if Air St. Luke's is - also other ground ambulances that come up from Boise area to provide transports ... if Life Flight is also in that element with the nonemergent transfers and interfacility transfers."

Arvidson said the statute requires that an ASA have an application process for ambulance services providers to be part of an ASA.

Arvidson sent a letter to Timm about a year ago requesting to be added to the local ASA.

"It has been a year. That's why I'm asking if I can have something by the end of the week, which I don't think is too unreasonable," he said.

Commissioner Mark Bennett said he would like to hear from staff before asking Arvidson to further discuss his request again at a future meeting.

He said the county has had concerns over the years about ensuring "that we keep a very fragile emergency system going."

Bennett said the county lost one ambulance provider in the Huntington area about three years ago and utilizes a 'gratis' service through Treasure Valley Paramedics.

Bennett said Treasure Valley Paramedics will only continue to provide transport in the Huntington area if they are making money.

Bennett explained that if it lost that service, the county would have to come up with the money - which it doesn't have - to provide ambulance service.

Bennett said Arvidson's service is important and he wasn't trying to minimize that.

He explained that until it is carefully and fiscally analyzed and shown that patient care is not affected, he wouldn't be able to make a decision.

"At the end of the day ... if for some reason Baker City says 'You know what, because we lost these transports, we aren't making it,' then where do we look to find those funds?" Bennett asked. "We have to secure what we have going and then we can branch out."

Arvidson said he just wants to provide nonemergent transport on calls that Baker City can't take if it is tied up with other calls. He said those nonemergent calls go to Life Flight, which is very expensive for patients while tying up those air flights.

He said Med Transport is called to take those nonemergent transports in Pendleton and in Union County on a regular basis.

Arvidson said the CEO of St. Alphonsus hospital in Baker City has issued a directive to not use Arvidson's service because Med Transport is not licensed.

"I feel somebody from the city or county told them that I didn't have a license," he said.

Bennett and EMS Fire Division Manager Gary Timm said they were offended that Arvidson would say that.

"Nobody from the county went to the hospital," Bennett said.

Med Transport Manager Jay Wilson said the company is licensed to transport patients anywhere in the state of Oregon.

He said technically it's the hospital or the patient that is free to call whatever ambulance service they choose.

"If Baker Fire says 'no we can't take a (nonemergent transport),' then please call us before you call Life Flight because it frees up that resource," Wilson said.

If BCFD is doing two transports at a time and then its 9-1-1 volume gets high "and somebody has a heart attack and dies because they called 9-1-1 - that's what we're really trying to avoid."

Arvidson and Wilson said they don't want to take revenue away from Baker City by taking transports the city already takes, just the ones that are getting taken by air ambulance services.

"If anything, we're affecting Life Flights," Wilson said.

See more in Monday's issue of the Baker City Herald.