

Introduction

The following medical treatment protocols are developed for North Carolina EMS agencies. The process has evolved since 2007 and continues with input from Medical Directors, EMS Administration, North Carolina Chapter of Emergency Physicians Protocol Committee, North Carolina Office of EMS, EMS field personnel and the public at large through on-line surveys, public meetings across North Carolina and direct communication with stakeholders. The 2017 update expands on the 2012 and 2009 version and continues to incorporate evidence-based guidelines, expert opinion and historically proven practices meant to ensure that citizens and visitors of North Carolina will continue to be provided the highest quality pre-hospital patient care available. The North Carolina Chapter of Emergency Physicians develops and provides final approval.

The purpose of the protocol section is to provide treatment protocols outlining permissible and appropriate assessment, delivery of care, reassessment and procedures which may be rendered by pre-hospital providers. The protocols also outline which medical situations require direct voice communication with medical control. In general treatment protocols are specific orders which may and should be initiated prior to contact with Medical Control.

Please note the medical protocols are divided into three (3) to four (4) sections. The upper section includes three (3) boxes (History, Signs and Symptoms and Differential) which serves as a guide to assist in obtaining pertinent patient information and exam findings as well as considering multiple potential causes of the patients complaint. It is not expected that every historical element or sign / symptom be recorded for every patient. It is expected that those elements pertinent to your patient encounter will be included in the patient evaluation.

The algorithm section describes the essentials of patient care. Virtually every patient should receive the care outlined in this section, usually in the order described. However each medical emergency must be dealt with individually and appropriate care determined accordingly. Professional judgment is mandatory in determining treatment modalities within the parameters of these protocols. Circumstances will arise where treatment may move ahead in the algorithm, move outside to another protocol and then re-enter later. While protocols are written based on body systems and primary complaints the patient should be treated as a whole and therefore the protocols should be considered as a whole in providing care.

Professional judgment hierarchy:

The pre-hospital provider may determine that no specific treatment is needed;

Or

The pre-hospital provider may follow the appropriate treatment protocols and then consult Medical Control;

Or

The pre-hospital provider may consult Medical Control before initiating any specific treatment.

Some protocols will encompass two (2) pages. Protocols which exist in a single page format may have page 2 added by the local medical director. The PEARLS section will either be located at the bottom of page 1 (single page protocol) or page 2 (double page protocol). The PEARLS section provides points regarding the main protocol based on evidence to date, common medical knowledge and expert medical opinion.

Information boxes highlighted in purple. These areas are editable at the local level. They will mainly involve specific medications and dosages utilized by the local EMS agency. Page 2 will have a large section highlighted in purple where the local Medical Director may edit as they see fit to provide expanded points and treatment not otherwise specified in the algorithm. If the box is not to be utilized – add “***This Space Left Blank Intentionally.***”

Finally these medical treatment protocols are established to ensure safe, efficient and effective interventions to relieve pain and suffering and improve patient outcomes without inflicting harm. They also serve to ensure a structure of accountability for Medical Directors, EMS agencies, pre-hospital providers and facilities to provide continual performance improvement. A recent report of the Institute of Medicine calls for the development of standardized, evidence-based pre-hospital care protocols for the triage, treatment and transport of patients. These protocols establish expectations of pre-hospital care in North Carolina.

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Authors:

R. Darrell Nelson, MD

Medical Director Davie and Stokes County
Assistant Medical Director Forsyth County
Assistant Professor
Wake Forest University
Department of Emergency Medicine
Co-Chairman NCCEP EMS Committee
Chairman NCCEP Protocol Committee

Doug Swanson, MD

Medical Director Mecklenburg County EMS Agency
Medical Director MedCenter Air CCT
Associate Professor
Carolinas Medical Center / UNC-Chapel Hill
Department of Emergency Medicine
Co-Chairman NCCEP EMS Committee

Roberto (Bobby) Portela, MD

Medical Director Pitt County EMS
Clinical Assistant Professor
East Carolina University
Department of Emergency Medicine

Eric Hawkins, MD

Medical Director Union County EMS
Carolinas Medical Center

Juan March, MD

Professor and Chief, Division of EMS
East Carolina University
Department of Emergency Medicine

Jason Stopyra, MD

Medical Director Randolph County EMS
Medical Director Surry County EMS
Assistant Professor
Wake Forest University
Department of Emergency Medicine

Jeff Williams, MD

Deputy Medical Director Wake County EMS
Assistant Professor
UNC-Chapel Hill
Department of Emergency Medicine

Bryan Kitch, MD

Medical Director Hyde County
Assistant Professor
East Carolina University
Department of Emergency Medicine

Seth C. Hawkins, MD

Medical Director Burke County EMS
Assistant Professor
Wake Forest University
Department of Emergency Medicine

Matthew Harmody, MD

Medical Director, FirstHealth EMS and CCT
Medical Director, Moore Regional Hospital
Medical Director Moore Regional Hospital-Hoke Campus EDs

Mark Quale, MD

Medical Director Alamance County EMS
Clinical Affiliate
Wake Forest University
Department of Emergency Medicine

Henderson McGinnis, MD

Medical Director Wilkes County EMS
Medical Director Wake Forest Baptist AirCare CCT
Associate Professor
Wake Forest University
Department of Emergency Medicine

Jose Cabanos, MD

Director Wake County EMS
Medical Director Wake County EMS
Adjunct Associate Professor
UNC-Chapel Hill
Department of Emergency Medicine

Jane Brice, MD

Professor and Chair
UNC-Chapel Hill
Department of Emergency Medicine