**EMTALA - MODEL Facility Policy**

**POLICY NAME:** Colorado EMTALA – Provision of On-Call Coverage Policy

**DATE:** (facility to insert date here)

**NUMBER:** (facility to insert number here)

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This policy reflects guidance under the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act (EMTALA) and associated State laws only. It does not reflect any requirements of The Joint Commission or other regulatory entities.

The definitions in the Company EMTALA Policy, LL.EM.001, apply to this and all other Company and facility EMTALA policies.

**Purpose:** To establish guidelines for the hospital, including a specialty hospital, and its personnel to be prospectively aware of which physicians, including specialists and sub-specialists, are available to provide additional medical evaluation and treatment necessary to stabilize individuals with emergency medical conditions (EMCs) in accordance with the resources available to the hospital as required by EMTALA, 42 U.S.C. § 1395dd, and all Federal and State regulations and interpretive guidelines promulgated thereunder.

**Policy:** The hospital must maintain a list of physicians on its medical staff who have privileges at the hospital or if it participates in a community call plan, a list of all physicians who participate in such plan. Physicians on the list must be available after the initial examination to provide treatment necessary to stabilize individuals with EMCs who are receiving services in accordance with the resources available to the hospital. The cooperation of the hospital's medical staff members with this policy is vital to the hospital's success in complying with the on-call provisions of EMTALA. The hospital should make its privileged physicians aware of their legal obligations as reflected in this policy and the Medical Staff Bylaws and should take all necessary steps to ensure that physicians perform their obligations as set forth herein and in each document.

**Procedure:**

**Develop an On-Call Schedule.** The facility's governing board must require that the medical staff be responsible for developing an on-call rotation schedule that includes the name and direct telephone number or direct pager of each physician who is required to fulfill on-call duties. Practice group names and general office numbers are not acceptable for contacting the on-call physician. Individual physician names with accurate contact information, including the direct telephone number or direct pager where the physician can be reached, are to be put on the on-call list. The hospital MUST be able to contact the on-call physician with the number provided on the list. If the on-call physician decides to list an answering service number as the preferred method of contact, his/her mobile phone number must be provided to the hospital as a backup number to reach the on-call physician. The backup number will be used by hospital and Patient Logistics Center (PLC) personnel when the On-Call Physician does not respond to calls in a timely manner. Each physician is responsible for updating his or her contact information as necessary. Each hospital shall provide a copy of the daily on-call schedule to the PLC.

The on-call schedule may be by specialty or sub-specialty (e.g., general surgery, orthopedic surgery, hand surgery, plastic surgery), as determined by the hospital and implemented by the relevant

department chairpersons. The Medical Executive Committee (MEC) shall review the on-call schedule and make recommendations to the CEO when formal changes are to be made or when legal and/or operational issues arise.

The hospital shall keep local Emergency Medical Services advised of the times during which certain specialties are unavailable.

Only physicians that are available to physically come to the ER may be included on the on-call list. A physician available via telemedicine does not satisfy the on-call requirements under EMTALA.

**Specialty Hospital Call.** A specialty hospital such as a psychiatric, orthopedic, or heart hospital that does not operate an emergency department is still subject to EMTALA requirements, and must maintain an on-call list and accept appropriate transfers when requested to do so.

**Records.** The hospital must keep a record of all physicians on-call and on-call schedules for at least five years. Any on-call list must reflect any and all substitutions from the time of first posting of the list. These records may be in electronic or hardcopy format.

**Maintain a List.** Each hospital must maintain a list of physicians who are on-call for duty after the initial examination to provide treatment necessary to stabilize an individual with an EMC. The Medical Staff Bylaws or appropriate policy and procedures must define the responsibility of on-call physicians to respond, examine, and treat patients with an EMC. Factors to consider in developing the on-call list include: the level of trauma and emergency care afforded by the hospital; number of physicians on the medical staff who are holding the privileges of the specialty; other demands on the physicians; frequency with which the physician's services are required; and the provisions the hospital has made for situations where the on-call physician is not available or not able to respond due to circumstances beyond his or her control. The hospital is expected to provide adequate specialty on-call coverage consistent with the services provided at the hospital and the resources the hospital has available.

In addition, the on-call list requirement applies to any hospital with specialized capabilities that is participating in the Medicare program regardless of whether the hospital has a DED. Specialty Hospitals must have appropriate on-call specialists available for receiving those individuals transferred pursuant to EMTALA. Hospitals should verify that the privileges of each on-call physician are current as to the procedures that each on-call physician is able to perform and the services that each on-call physician may provide.

The on-call list maintained for the main hospital Emergency Department shall be the on-call list for the hospital, including any Off-Campus Provider-based Emergency Departments.

**Physician's Responsibility.** The hospital has a process to ensure that when a physician is identified as being "on-call" to the DED for a given specialty, it shall be that physician's duty and responsibility to assure the following:

1. Immediate availability, at least by telephone, to the ED physician for his or her scheduled "on-call" period, or to secure a qualified alternate who has privileges at the hospital if appropriate.
2. If a PLC is being utilized to contact the on-call physician, the on-call physician must respond to the PLC within a reasonable timeframe (generally, within 30 minutes).
3. Arrival or response to the DED within a reasonable timeframe (generally, response by the physician is expected within 30 minutes). The ED physician, in consultation with the on-call physician, shall determine whether the individual's condition requires the on-call physician to see the individual immediately. The determination of the ED physician or other practitioner who

has personally examined the individual and is currently treating the individual shall be controlling in this regard.

4. The on-call physician has a responsibility to provide specialty care services as needed to any individual who comes to the Emergency Department either as an initial presentation or upon transfer from another facility.
5. The on-call physician has a responsibility to notify the Medical Staff Office of changes to the on-call schedule.

**Authority to Decline Transfers.** The on-call physician does not have the authority to refuse an appropriate transfer on behalf of the facility.

Only the CEO, Administrator-on-Call (AOC), or a hospital leader who routinely takes administrative call has the authority to verify that the facility does not have the capability and capacity to accept a transfer. A transfer request which may be declined must first be reviewed with this individual before a final decision to refuse acceptance is made. This requirement applies to all transfer requests, regardless of whether the transfer request is facilitated by a PLC representative or the facility's CEO designee or ED physician. Individuals qualified to serve as an AOC include the CEO, CFO, CNO, COO, CMO, ECO, VP Quality and other senior leaders reporting directly to the CEO. Other individuals who may be qualified based on experience include an ACFO, ACNO, Associate Administrator or similarly titled individuals. In general, a department director is not qualified to serve as an AOC. Additionally, a Nursing Supervisor, House Supervisor or other similarly titled position is not considered to be an equivalent of the AOC.

**Financial Inquiries.** Medical Staff Members who are on-call and who are called to provide treatment necessary to stabilize an individual with an EMC may not inquire about the individual's ability to pay or source of payment before coming to the DED and no facility employee, including PLC employees, may provide such information to a physician on the phone.

**Physician Appearance Requirements.** If a physician on the on-call list is called by the hospital to provide emergency screening or treatment and either fails or refuses to appear within a reasonable timeframe, the hospital and that physician may be in violation of EMTALA as provided for under section 1867(d)(1)(C) of the Social Security Act. If a physician is listed as on-call and requested to make an in-person appearance to evaluate and treat an individual, that physician must respond in person within a reasonable amount of time. For those physicians who do not respond within a reasonable amount of time, the Chain of Command Policy should be initiated.

Note: Each facility should define a reasonable timeframe – generally that timeframe should not be greater than 30 minutes.

If, as a result of the on-call physician's failure to respond to an on-call request, the hospital must transfer the individual to another facility for care, the hospital must document on the transfer form the name and address of the physician who refused or failed to appear.

**Call by Non-Physician Practitioners.** The ED physician must be able to first confer with the on-call physician. Midlevel practitioners (usually physician assistants or advanced practice registered nurses) who are employed by and have protocol agreements with the on-call physician, may appear at the hospital and provide further assessment or stabilizing treatment to the individual only after the on-call physician and ED physician confer and the on-call physician so directs the licensed non-physician practitioner to appear at the hospital. The individual's medical needs and capabilities of the hospital, along with the State scope of practice laws, hospital bylaws, and rules and regulations, must be thoroughly reviewed prior to implementing this process. The designated on-call physician remains

ultimately responsible for providing the necessary services to the individual in the DED regardless of who makes the first in-person visit. If the ED physician does not believe that the non-physician practitioner is the appropriate practitioner to respond and requests the on-call physician to appear, the on-call physician must come to the hospital to see the individual.

**Selective Call and Avoiding Responsibility.** Medical Staff Members may not relinquish specific clinical privileges for the purpose of avoiding on-call responsibility. The Board of Trustees is responsible for assuring adequate on-call coverage of specialty services in a manner that meets the needs of the community in accordance with the resources available to the hospital. Exemptions for certain medical staff members (e.g., senior physicians) would not per se violate EMTALA-related Medicare provider agreement requirements. However, if a hospital permits physicians to selectively take call ONLY for their own established patients who present to the DED for evaluation, then the hospital must be careful to assure that it maintains adequate on-call services, and that the selective call policy is not a substitute for the on-call services required by the Medicare provider agreement.

**Providing Elective Surgeries or Other Therapeutic or Diagnostic Procedures While On-Call.** The hospital shall have in place policies and procedures to ensure that specialty services are available to meet the needs of any individual with an EMC if the hospital permits on-call physicians to schedule elective surgeries during the time that they are on-call. An on-call physician who undertakes an elective surgery while on-call must arrange for an appropriate physician with comparable hospital privileges to serve as back-up to provide on-call coverage and notify the facility of such determination. The facility will ensure that the DED is familiar with the back-up arrangement for any physician performing elective procedures.

**Simultaneous Call.** Physicians are permitted to have simultaneous call at more than one hospital in the geographic area; however, the physician must provide the hospital with the physician's on-call schedule so that the hospital can have a plan in place to meet its EMTALA obligation to the community. This plan could include back-up call by an additional physician or the implementation of an appropriate transfer. An on-call physician may not choose which hospital in which to treat a patient purely for the physician's convenience (e.g., if a physician is on-call for both Hospitals A and B, is at Hospital B, but requested to come to Hospital A by the Hospital A ED physician, the on-call physician is obligated to treat the patient at Hospital A).

**Back-up Plans and Transfers.** The hospital shall have in place a written plan for transfer and/or back-up call coverage by a physician of the same specialty or subspecialty for situations in which a particular specialty is not available or the on-call physician cannot respond due to circumstances beyond the physician's control. The ED physician shall determine whether to attempt to contact another such specialist or immediately arrange for a transfer. The hospital must be able to demonstrate that hospital staff is aware of and able to execute the back-up procedures.

Appropriate transfer agreements shall be in place for those occasions when an on-call specialist is not available within a reasonable period of time to provide care for those individuals who require specialty or subspecialty physician care and a transfer is necessary. A list of facilities with which the hospital has transfer arrangements and the specialties represented shall be available to the individual or PLC responsible for facilitating the transfer. The transfer agreements shall not include financial provisions for EMTALA transfers.

**Transfer to Physician's Office.** When a physician who is on-call is in his or her office, the hospital may NOT refer individuals receiving treatment for an EMC to the physician's office for examination and

treatment. The physician must come to the hospital to examine the individual if requested by the treating physician.

**<u>Community Call Plan</u>.** A community call plan is designed to meet the needs of the communities served utilizing the resources within the region. A community call plan facilitates appropriate transfers to the hospital providing the specialty on-call services pursuant to the plan, but does not relieve any hospital of any EMTALA obligations with respect to transfer. Even though a hospital may participate in a community call plan, the hospital must still accept appropriate transfers from non-participating hospitals.

Any community call plan must be approved by Operations Counsel and meet all applicable federal and state regulations and guidelines.

**<u>Community Emergency Centers</u>.** The following requirements apply to the Community Emergency Center in addition to the EMTALA requirements noted above:

a) If the Community Emergency Center has an on-call schedule for specialists, the on-call schedule, including alternates or back-up physicians, will be posted in the emergency services area at all times.

b) If the Community Emergency Center has a physician available to cover emergency services by telephone and not on-site, the physician must be able to arrive in the emergency services area within 30 minutes of the need for physician services having been determined.