



**TOWN OF
BROOKLINE, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

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*Draft Minutes
Ambulance Billing Evaluation Committee
Tuesday, December 4, 2018*

Members in attendance at the beginning of the meeting: Brendan Denehy, Shawn Jackson, Brian Rater, Todd Christensen and Tad Putney. Absent: Tim McGettigan and Jim Deffely.

Brendan opened to meeting at 6:30pm.

Minutes

Todd moved, seconded by Shawn, to approve the October 30th meeting minutes as written; Voted Yes 5-0-1; Brian abstained. Brian moved, seconded by Todd, to approve the November 14th meeting minutes as amended; Voted Yes 6-0. Brian moved, seconded by Shawn, to approve the November 26th meeting minutes as written; Voted Yes 5-0-1; Todd abstained.

Hollis Fire Chief Rick Towne

Chief Towne said that Hollis began billing in 1999 after one selectman, a physician, asked him why they did not bill. The decision was made to look into billing over the course of about a year. He said that he was not in favor of billing at the time. They conducted research, including of other towns, and came to the decision that billing for ambulance services made sense. **Chief Towne** said that the decision met with significant resistance, especially with the ambulance volunteers. He said there was concern that some residents would not call for an ambulance. **Chief Towne** said he was only interested in billing if the funds went into a separate account for the sole use by the ambulance service. He also noted that when the decision was made to try billing it was positioned as a “test” that could be discontinued, if warranted.

Chief Towne said they were non-aggressive in billing; only billed for what Medicare paid and did not pursue outstanding bills through a collections agency. He said they started from day one with the assistance of a third-party billing service. They met with three different billing companies and selected Comstar and have been pleased with them. Comstar does all the paperwork. He said there had been concern that the level of donations to the ambulance service would decline, but it remained largely unchanged.

Chief Towne said it took about a year for attendants to get used to billing and they then found the funds were very helpful in getting top-of-the-line equipment. He said after about six years the department was financially self-sufficient for everything except some salaries.

Chief Towne said in 2017 they did a total of 337 potentially billable transports:

- 242 were billable to an insurance company
- 41 were for non-insured
- 54 were totally written off

He said that the collection rates in 2017 were as follows:

- 93% from Blue Cross/Blue Shield
- 97% from other insurance companies
- 96% from Medicare
- 100% from Medicaid

He said that for the 242 transports billable to insurance companies, a total of about \$128,000 was billed and about \$123,000 was collected. He said there was a 43% collection rate on the 41 non-insured transports.

Chief Towne said the total amount billed in 2017 was \$158,658 and \$136,776 (86%) was collected. He noted that these annual figures are representative of what they have experienced over each of the last 4-5 years and he believes they are net of the commission paid to Comstar.

Chief Towne was asked about the process for write-offs. He said that if Comstar cannot send a bill to an insurance company, they send out an “information sheet” to the patient to complete and return. On the sheet it says that if the person is not able to pay, they should contact the fire chief. If the patient contacts him, he asks them to send a note requesting forgiveness of the bill and he decides if there is a write-off. He said everyone gets billed. **Chief Towne** said that if a resident expresses concern about being able to pay while in the midst of a call, attendants advise the individual not to worry. He said they do not forward unpaid bills to a collection agency. He noted that out of towners and car accident patients are difficult to collect from.

When asked if there were any surprises in the transition to billing, **Chief Towne** said the only surprise was how smooth the transition went. He said that if we are not billing insurance companies for transports, the insurance companies are just pocketing the money. He said that he has been surprised by the number of people without insurance who do not need to pay, but set up payment plans through Comstar.

Chief Towne said that he did not lose any service members as a result of moving to billing.

Chief Towne said he thinks Hollis pays Comstar 7% of revenues.

Chief Towne estimated that **Sheryl Corey** spends, on average, about two hours a day on billing and some additional time on a monthly basis reviewing monthly reports. He said that there are two sets of eyes that review a report for wording before it goes to Comstar.

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Hollis bought its most recent ambulance in 2010 and is due to buy a new one in a couple of months. The new ambulance will replace the 2006 ambulance.

The Hollis Fire Chief approves expenses out of the ambulance fund, but the expenses also require the approval of the Board of Selectmen.

Chief Towne said they have not been subjected to a Medicare audit, but he would not fear one as it is up to Comstar to have the town in a favorable position for an audit.

Chief Towne said that Hollis accepts assignment from all insurance companies except Blue Cross/Blue Shield.

When asked about high deductible plans, **Chief Towne** said that they make up a large portion of what they do not collect.

Jim Deffely joined the meeting at 7:10pm.

Chief Towne said that if the patient was from out of town, Comstar sends three bills. If the patient is a town resident, then only one bill is sent by Comstar.

Committee members thanked **Chief Towne** for his time and insights. He left at 7:15pm.

Committee members discussed **Chief Towne's** comments. **Shawn** said that if we only charged at Medicare rates, the projected income in our model could be cut in half. He also said that he likes the idea of having capital expenses paid out of a separate account. He noted that such funds could be provided through our contract with Mason (Hollis does not contract with another town like we do). **Brendan** noted that the Administrative Assistant spends about 25% of her time on billing and **Shawn's** department does not have such a person. He asked if **Shawn** and **Jan** would have the capacity to pick up the 10 hours a week for billing, plus additional time for the two of them to chase additional detail needed in reports in order to properly bill. **Shawn** said no. **Shawn** also pointed out that there is a space limitation for locating an administrative assistance.

Review of Draft Report

Committee members completed a page-by-page review of the draft report and agreed on edits to be made. **Tad** and **Shawn** will incorporate the edits and a revised report will be circulated to members for their review and comment.

Recommendations

Brian moved, seconded by Shawn, to recommend the Selectboard include a warrant article for March that, if approved, would result in billing for ambulance services; Voted Yes 6-0. It was noted that it had been 18 years since the topic was voted on at town meeting.

The committee members voted 4-2 against billing for ambulance services; Brian and Tad voted in the minority. [Secretary's note: It was noted that absent committee member **Tim McGettigan** had sent an email advising that he does not support billing, but it was determined that his vote could not formally count as he was not present at the meeting.]

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Next Meeting

Brendan asked if another meeting was necessary. It was agreed that **Tad** will circulate the update report and see what level of edits are suggested. If they are limited, no additional meeting will be needed. In such a case, the minutes of this meeting will remain “draft” and not be formally accepted as there will not be another meeting.

The committee will present its report to the Selectboard on December 17th.

Meeting adjourned at 9:28pm.

Minutes submitted by Tad Putney.