

Advisory Bulletin



Important Industry Information for our Valued Customers

Compliant Ambulance Billing for Air Transports

Question:

A motor vehicle accident occurs where the ambulance responds, extrication is involved, ALS/ALS2 services are rendered, and air transport is called. In addition, the transport from the ground crew to the helicopter is NOT done using the ambulance. The transport from ground to air involves either a gurney or a backboard. Is the treatment a billable service without the mileage? Is it reimbursable?

Answer:

From the Medicare perspective, there must be an actual transport - this means a patient must be transported by the ambulance (not simply being pushed on a stretcher or carried on a longboard/backboard). Ambulance base rates charged (e.g. BLS, ALS, ALS2, etc.) can only reflect an actual transport (the patient is in the back of the ambulance). Therefore, if any EMS services are rendered at the scene, but the patient is never transported in a ground ambulance, the ground service could not bill Medicare (as there was no ground transport).

It is possible that commercial/auto accident insurance rules and coverage may be different than Medicare's.

Another option, it may also be billable to the patient as a non-covered service (meaning the service is not covered by insurance, but billable to the patient). Often, this is billed as "treat no transport." It would be billed at a rate less than the full "transport" charge rate (i.e., BLS, ALS, ALS2, etc.).

Another option is to have a contract in place with the air ambulance service, and charge the air service for some of the "on-scene" care provided

by the ground crew. If it was the ground service that extricated the patient, performed interventions, used drugs and equipment, and prepped the patient, such that the air crew did little more than transport the patient, simply billing the air crew for the cost of the services and supplies may be an option. This should be arranged with and agreed upon by the air ambulance in writing and in advance. This may be a better option than billing the patient separately since the cost of the air ambulance will be significant.