



UTSW/Parkland BioTel EMS TRAINING BULLETIN

June 6, 2017

EMS TB 17-001

Clarification of “Drug Overdose” Patient Management

Purpose:

1. To clarify the appropriate management of patients in the UTSW/Parkland BioTel (“BioTel”) EMS System who have allegedly “overdosed” on street drugs or alcohol, versus management of patients who may have ingested prescription or over-the-counter (OTC) medications in an attempt to harm themselves.

Background:

1. EMS Providers recently have requested clarification regarding appropriate disposition of patients who may have ingested or “overdosed” on street drugs, such as “K2”, crack cocaine or heroin, or on alcohol.
2. Confusion has arisen from the following wording in Section 10.b. on page 94 of the [Custody Policy](#) of the current (2014-2017) [BioTel EMS Guidelines for Therapy](#), which states:

10. Overdose Patients

- a. When assessing a patient who has possibly intentionally overdosed on medications or other drugs, that patient should be considered a potential harm to himself or herself, even if they deny that they have overdosed.
 - b. If a third-party reports that a patient ingested drugs or medications in an attempt to harm himself or herself, OR if the third-party reports that the patient has expressed suicidal thoughts, the patient **MUST** be transported by ambulance.
 - c. Such patients must be transported to a receiving hospital emergency department for assessment of potentially life-threatening complications of an overdose AND whether they pose a threat to themselves and warrant psychiatric assessment.
 - d. Paramedics cannot determine this risk in the field. If such a patient declines assessment or transport, the local police agency should be called to assess the situation and determine if the patient should be placed under Emergency Detention. If the patient is not under Emergency Detention, paramedics shall contact BioTel for possible activation of the Emergency Legal Assistance Program (ELAP).
3. That wording does not clearly distinguish between patients who may have “overdosed” on street drugs or alcohol; who are awake, alert, oriented; and who decline EMS transport to a hospital Emergency Department, *versus* those who may have overdosed/ingested prescription or OTC medications in an attempt to harm themselves.

Summary and Clarification:

1. A person who may have “overdosed” on street drugs or alcohol, who is awake, alert, oriented and acting appropriately, AND who does NOT meet ANY mandatory transport criteria MAY refuse further evaluation and transport.
2. A person who may have “overdosed” on street drugs or alcohol who is awake, alert, oriented and acting appropriately BUT who DOES meet any mandatory transport criteria SHOULD be transported by EMS a hospital Emergency Department:
 - a. For any such patient who refuses transport, BioTel shall be contacted, as for any other high-risk patient who refuses transport.

3. A person reported by a third-party to have ingested street drugs, alcohol or prescription or OTC medications *in a self-harm attempt* MUST be transported by EMS to a hospital Emergency Department, even if s/he denies the attempt:
 - a. This applies even if the patient is not in law enforcement custody (under arrest) or under “emergency detention”.
 - b. For any such patient who refuses transport, BioTel shall be contacted, as for any other high-risk patient who refuses transport.
4. A person in law enforcement custody (under arrest) or is under “emergency detention” who may have ingested ANY street drug, alcohol, prescription medication or OTC medication MUST be transported to a hospital Emergency Department:
 - a. This is to help ensure that the patient does not later deteriorate in law enforcement custody.
 - b. For any such patient in custody who refuses transport, BioTel shall be contacted.
5. In all cases, appropriate, detailed documentation shall be performed.
6. In any case for which additional guidance or assistance may be needed, including possible activation of the Emergency Legal Assistance Program (ELAP), BioTel should be contacted.

Resources (verified/accessed 4 June 2017):

1. **2014-2017** UTSW/Parkland BioTel [Custody](#), [Destination](#), and [Evaluation & Transport](#) Policies
 2. **DRAFT 2018** UTSW/Parkland BioTel Custody, Destination, and Evaluation & Transport Policies (under development)
- ***UTSW/BioTel EMS Providers may contact BioTel or the [EMS Medical Direction Team](#) at any time with questions or concerns about this Training Bulletin or its content***