



**Federal Aviation
Administration**

**Advisory Committee on Air Ambulance Quality and Patient Safety (AAQPS)
Stakeholder Webinar
October 17, 2024**

- Good afternoon, this is David Wright, and I'm the Director of the Quality Safety and Oversight group here at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).

I also serve as the Designated Federal Officer for the Air Ambulance Quality and Patient Safety Federal Advisory Committee, and I appreciate you all taking the time to dial in to learn more about this work.

We are a Federal Advisory Committee, and this is our 1st national stakeholder call. So, we appreciate your participation.

This Committee was authorized as part of the No Surprises Act of 2021, which requires the Secretary of Health and Human Services and the Secretary of Transportation to establish and convene an advisory committee for the purpose of reviewing options to establish quality, patient safety, and clinical capability standards for air ambulances. The Secretary of Health and Human Services has asked the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and specifically the Center for Clinical Standards and Quality (CCSQ), which my group is housed in within CMS, to chair and manage this Committee. And we're pleased to partner with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) within the Department of Transportation (DOT).

The purpose of our webinar today is to engage with you all in the ambulance community to provide you with the current information we have regarding this Advisory Committee.

Here at CMS, we believe it's crucial to obtain diverse perspectives in order to ensure that the Committee is well informed, and we could drive meaningful recommendations to improve air ambulance services. Even after the webinar today, we encourage you to continue engaging with us and we look forward to hearing from you.

Today, we'll provide you with an overview of the Committee and the timeline for the meetings. We'll also take some questions after the overview, and you can submit your questions at any time using the Q&A box.

CMS is contracted with the operator of our Federally-Funded Research and Development Center at the MITRE Corporation to assist with the management of this Committee. At this time, I'm going to turn the webinar over to Tasmee Weik to give you an overview.

Tasmeen?

- Thank you. Good afternoon or good morning, depending on where you're from. Thank you again for joining us today.

As David mentioned, the purpose of our call today is to give you an overview of the Air Ambulance Quality and Patient Safety Advisory Committee or AAQPS, let you know who the members are on the Committee, provide you with some information regarding the meetings, and then we would be happy to take your questions.

Again, to ask questions, there is a Q&A chat box at the bottom of your zoom screen. Feel free to use that to ask questions at any point during the presentation, and we will answer as many as we can towards the end.

So first, I want to let you know who the federal staff are that are going to be involved with managing the AAQPS.

As David already mentioned, CMS, and specifically the division CCSQ, are the lead on the Committee.

David Wright is the Designated Federal Official for the Committee. Ashley Spence, who is also on the call, is a Senior Advisor in CCSQ, and will be taking the lead on Committee management.

In addition to that, there are a number of advisors from CCSQ that will be helping us with the oversight of the Clinical Standards (CS) Subcommittee, which I'll talk about more in a couple of minutes.

On the Department of Transportation side, as David mentioned, the Federal Aviation Administration is a partner and the DOT specifically has a designee on the Committee which is Robert Rekert, but, in addition to that, their Flight Standards group, Nolan Crawford and Tom Luipersbeck are involved with the oversight of the Flight Safety Subcommittee, which I'll also talk about in a minute.

And then, in addition to that, there are folks from the regulation side who help with the Federal Advisory Committee Management: Thuy Cooper, Tyeshia Roberson-Curtis, Uchenna Nwaobilor, and David Maxwell.

As David mentioned, MITRE is the operator of the Health and Human Services (HHS) Federally-Funded Research and Development Center, and we have been contracted to help manage the Committee.

We have a number of staff including myself. Again, I'm Tasmeen Weik, with expertise in emergency medical services and flight safety. And we will be helping with Committee management, with agenda development, and with hosting and facilitating some of the Committee meetings. We are also point of contact for, all of you, the air ambulance

stakeholders. Please do not hesitate to contact us at any point you have questions, and we'll be providing you with our email address at the end of this presentation.

So, the purpose of the AAQPS, as written in the No Surprises Act, was really to establish a federal advisory committee to provide recommendations on how to improve the quality, patient safety, and clinical capability standards for air ambulances.

The outcome that we hope the Committee will achieve is to define some innovative approaches for improving quality, accessibility, affordability, and sustainability of air ambulance services, and the main deliverable of the Committee is a report to Congress.

The report to Congress is supposed to be centered around 5 specific areas. And I'm going to focus on these 5 areas because this is going to be the scope of the Committee's discussions, and the scope of their deliberations, and ultimately recommendations to Congress.

These areas are: qualifications of different clinical capability levels and the tearing of such levels; patient safety and quality standards; clinical triage criteria for air ambulances; options for improving service reliability during poor weather, night conditions or other adverse conditions; and differences between air ambulance vehicle types, services and technologies, and other flight capability standards, and the impact of such differences on patient safety.

So again, these are the 5 areas that were underlined in the No Surprises Act and are under the charter of the of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), and these will drive the agenda topics that the Committee will discuss and deliberate on and the areas under which the Committee will make recommendations to Congress.

We have seated the Advisory Committee. I'm going to introduce all of the members of the Committee. Each of these members, you'll see across the top, meet a role that was defined in the charter of the Committee.

The HHS Designee and the Chair of the Committee is Jeff Richey. Jeff is the Executive Director at the University of Washington Medicine Airlift. He is also the Associated Administrator for Harbor View Medical Center, serving Alaska and Washington State. He has served as a critical care nurse for 28 years and has also served on the board of the Association of Air Medical Services.

The healthcare provider representative on the Committee is Dr. Bill Hinckley. He's an Associate Professor at the University of Cincinnati, where he's also an ER physician. He has served as a flight physician and Ground and Air Medical Director in Cincinnati. And he also has a lot of experience serving as the medical director for many fire departments and has also served as the past President of the Association of Air Medical Services.

The charter required having a representative from an accrediting body with experience and expertise in clinical standards, and that role is served by Eileen Frazer. She's the Executive Director for the Commission on Accreditation of Medical Transport Systems (CAMTS). The organization has been working, for decades, on the standards for safety quality patient care.

There is an additional representative on the HHS side. That role is filled by Jason Clark. He's the Senior Vice President of Field Operations at APOLLO MedFlight in Texas. He oversees clinical care and communications and has served in the transport medicine industry for more than 25 years.

An additional HHS representative is Dr. Mark Gamber. He's the Chief Medical Officer for Alacura Medical Transport Management and is a practicing emergency room physician. He's also served as the EMS Medical Director in Dallas-Fort Worth and practices at a level one trauma center; and has also had a lot of experience working in rural areas.

We were also required to have a representative from a group health insurance plan to provide the health insurer perspective, and that role is filled by Dr. Jordan Pritzker. He's the Executive Regional Medical Director in Medical Policy and Operations at Aetna. He's been there for over 15 years. He also is a member of AHIP, America's Health Insurance Plan representative, and has served as a physician for more than 20 years.

We were also required to have a state insurance regulator, and that role is filled by Grace Arnold. She's the Commissioner for the Minnesota Department of Commerce and is a State Insurance Commissioner. She brings a ton of experience in setting up health insurance exchanges and in the Affordable Care Act as well.

As I mentioned before, the DOT designee for the Committee is Robert Reckert. He's the Manager of the Air Transportation Division. The Transportation Division is part of the Office of Safety Standards within the Flight Standard Service. Mr. Reckert has served as the Acting Deputy Director for Air Carrier Safety Assurance and as the Regulatory Support Division Manager in that division.

We have a number of DOT appointees, 5 of them specifically.

So, starting with Ben Clayton, Ben is the CEO for LifeFlight, which is a nonprofit that has a number of aircrafts across 5 states. He's been a marine and has been focused on safety and is trained in air crash investigation and has also been a pilot for 19 years.

Jim Houser is the President of the Center for Emergency Medicine in Western Pennsylvania. He has expertise in EMS training and in national research across various government agencies. He's operated 18 helicopter bases and 3 critical ground ambulance services and has over 28 years of experience as a paramedic and nurse practitioner.

Tom Judge is the founder and past CEO of LifeFlight of Maine. He has previously worked as a paramedic and has served as the past President of Air Medical Services and past Chair of the Association of Critical Care Transport, and, again, brings decades of experience in national helicopter safety.

Paul Julander, is from PHI Health, which is an aircraft company that operates across 15 states. He has over 25 years of experience as a paramedic and in fire and rescue. And he has also served in the Air Medical Association Board of Directors.

Jason Quisling is the Senior Vice President of Flight Operations at Air Methods. Again, he has over 33 years of experience in aviation and in the air medical industry, and he's held a number of different roles in various organizations.

And then, lastly, we do have a patient advocacy representative for patient advocacy. Our representative is Colonel Steven Coffee. He's a career military officer in the Air Force. He founded Patients for Patient Safety, A broad network that includes patient safety champions around the country. His staff assignments have included 3 combat command tours, 2 in the National Security Agency, and he is a nationally recognized patient advocate with a lot of experience with actively advocating for a family member that had a personal experience with air ambulance care.

So, as you can see, we have an incredible diversity of experiences and expertise on the Committee, and we are very grateful for all of these individuals who are volunteering their time to be on the Committee.

As I mentioned, the main Committee members that I just introduced serve as the main AAQPS Committee.

The Committee will also have 2 Subcommittees and each of the Subcommittees will be focused on a few of the statutory areas that I described before.

So, we will have a Clinical Standards (CS) Subcommittee. The Clinical Standards Subcommittee will be focused on the 3 areas around the qualifications of different clinical capability levels and tiering of such levels; the patient safety and quality standards; and clinical triage criteria for air ambulances. We are currently in the process of seating those Subcommittee members, and they are being selected from those who applied to be on the main Committee but were not selected for the main Committee.

The Flight Safety (FS) Subcommittee will be focused on options for improving service reliability during poor weather, night conditions, or other adverse conditions, and differences between air ambulance types and technologies and other flight capability standards. And those Subcommittee members are actually the 5 DOT appointees from the main Committee. And then, the Subcommittee will bring on additional subject matter expertise as needed.

Lastly, we're pleased to announce that the 1st meeting of the AAQPS will be on December 12th, from 10 am to 5 pm Eastern Time. The meeting is public and it will be broadcasted on the CMS YouTube channel.

If you would like to make a public comment during that meeting, we will shortly publish a Federal Register Notice, where you will be able to register to provide a public comment during that meeting.

We also have tentative dates for the next 2 meetings of the Committee, which will be in February and May. The May 8th meeting is planned to be the last meeting of the main Committee.

All information regarding the Committee is available on the CMS website, and we will put the website in the chat for you. You can stay up to date on the Committee's deliberations, notes from the meetings, as well as again register for submitting a public comment should you wish on that website.

Again, the December 12th meeting will be the 1st meeting, and if you would like to provide a public comment, very shortly, you will be able to register to do that on that CMS website that we just chatted out.

And if you'd like to just view the meeting, you'll be able to do that on the CMS YouTube channel, any of the public meetings.

And then, as I mentioned previously, we absolutely want to engage with all of you in the air ambulance industry. You are welcome to reach out to us anytime. Michelle Cantu is the point of contact. She's putting her email address in the chat. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us if you have questions or if there are specific agenda topics that you would like to propose. You are more than welcome to send those to us.

And, with that, we would love to open it up for questions. Again, there is a Q&A icon at the bottom of your Zoom screen. So, you can use that to chat any questions that you might have.

So, we'll give it a few minutes to give you all a chance to type in your questions.

We're not seeing any yet.

So, we have a 1st question. When will the Subcommittee members be notified, and what is the timeline for selecting Subcommittee members?

Great question. Ashley, I'm going to give that one to you and David.

- Sure, happy to jump in. Good afternoon, everyone. So, we are in the process of reviewing all of the Subcommittee members currently, and we anticipate notifying those folks within the next 2 weeks.

- The next question is what is the timeframe for finishing the report? I'll start and then, again, give it to Ashley and David.

So, we again are anticipating right now that the Committee will finish its deliberations at its last meeting on May 8th. And then the report will need to be written after that and then sent to CMS. Ashley, I'll hand it over to you from there.

- Sure. So, these are always tough questions because as you all know there's a process before things are approved and cleared and have gone through all the proper channels to be published, but we anticipate, as Tasmeen said, at least having a consensus or a framework of the report in the summer next year, and with publishing happening later in 2025, so fall/winter season of 2025.

- Great. The next question is whether the public will be able to see the ongoing work of the Committee and provide public comments on that work.

Again, I'll start off and, Ashley, David, please add to that. So, we will have official notes and recordings from each of the public meetings, and those will be posted on the CMS website. So, you'll be able, in full transparency, to see what the Committee's agenda has been, what they have been deliberating on, and all of the 3 meetings that we mentioned are public, and there is opportunity to provide public comment at those meetings. And then, as I also mentioned, you are also welcome to reach out to us via email if you'd like to provide any commentary outside of those public meetings.

David, Ashley, anything to add to that one?

- Nothing additional for me.

- Okay. Next question is can you elaborate on the relationship with the Subcommittees and the full Committee. Will the full Committee approve Subcommittee recommendations?

Excellent question. Yes, so the Subcommittees are Subcommittees of the full Committee.

Each of the Subcommittees will meet and spend dedicated time on those topical areas that I showed before that I'm going to just circle back to.

And then, they will provide their recommendations to the full Committee, and during the public meetings of the full Committee is where everyone can hear what the Subcommittees are suggesting and recommending. And the full Committee will deliberate on those recommendations at the public meetings. So, again, there's a sort of public deliberations of all of Subcommittee recommendations.

We also have a question which, Ashley, I'll give to you. The Flight Safety Subcommittee will have 5 members from the DOT appointees. How many members will form the Clinical Standard Subcommittee?

- Thanks. So, the Subcommittee will likely be comparable in size, plus or minus just a couple additional people.

As you saw with the makeup of the parent Committee, there is some variation in some of the clinical expertise of the parent Committee, and so we did the same for the Subcommittee to just ensure that we have the right subject matter expertise.

We anticipate that the size will be comparable, but likely just a couple additional people than 5, so just a couple more than that.

- And, on that topic, Ashley, someone's asking whether the Subcommittee members information will be posted on the CMS website or whether it'll just be the Committee members.

- I think that's something that we could visit. I'm just, I'm sorry my wheels are turning because I'm thinking of what we typically have done for some of the other FACAs that CMS has posted. So, I think it's something that we can certainly revisit.

As a reminder, just to say here that, most of the time, the Subcommittee meetings are not public meetings. So, they aren't streamed in the same way that the parent Committee meetings are. But we can certainly visit with the Subcommittee team once they are seated, if they are comfortable with posting the list.

- Correct.

And again, any and all of the Subcommittee recommendations are going to be given to the main Committee in the public meetings, which will be live streamed on the CMS website. So, all of the work of the Subcommittee, the final recommendations, will be sort of in the public domain through the live meetings and the meeting notes, etc.

- Correct.

- We have a question about whether the Committee will be looking at both rotor-wing and fixed-wing and will it include public safety and not-for-profit programs as well?

That is an excellent question that the Flight Safety Subcommittee will be looking at. No final decisions have been made, but, as of right now, we are including both fixed- and rotor-wing, and both public safety as well as nonprofit, sort of all of those that fall in the air ambulance category. But again, more to come on that once the Flight Safety Subcommittee has had a chance to discuss that issue.

Great questions. Thank you so much, and please feel free to keep them coming.

Alright, we have a question about will the slides from this meeting be made available. Ashley, I'll give that one to you.

- They will. We plan to post the slides, the transcript, and recording on the AAQPS Webpage, so the link that was in the chat, and we can drop it in there again if you don't have it.

But yes, we plan to make this available, and then, just to reiterate, all the public meetings and all of the materials from the Subcommittee will all live on that same page.

- Again, we appreciate everyone being here today and for your interest in the AAQPS.

We hope that you will continue engaging with us. We really appreciate your questions and will appreciate your feedback.

So, once again, the AAQPS website will be updated at regular intervals. So, more information is to come as we have it on the Committee, and you can also reach out to Michelle at mcantu@mitre.org. Her email address is in the chat, if you'd like to give us any feedback or have any additional questions that you didn't get a chance to ask here.

So, I'm not seeing any additional questions. We'll give it one more minute, and then, David and Ashley, I'll see if there's anything else you want to say before we adjourn.

- So just while we're waiting, thank you again for your participation, your engagement, and we look forward to your continued interest in assistance with us for this really important work.

This is just the kickoff and there'll be more to come, and we really appreciate your insights and perspective as we move forward. So, thank you.

- Okay, now, I'm not seeing any additional questions. So, reiterating our thanks for your participation today, and we will adjourn the webinar.

Thank you everyone for attending.