

Ambulance to ease obesity strain

JILL PENGELLEY, HEALTH REPORTER

March 10, 2007 12:00am

Article from: (http://www.theadvertiser.news.com.au/?from=ni_story)

The Advertiser

THE SA Ambulance Service has been forced to buy a heavy-duty ambulance to cope with increasing numbers of morbidly obese patients.

People who dial triple 0 for an ambulance are now asked if the patient weighs more than 110kg before an ambulance is dispatched.

Eight years ago, paramedics were transporting about 10 such patients a year but that figure is expected to reach 100 a year in the near future. One patient collected recently had weighed 347kg.

Operations manager Dean Clarke said ambulance officers used to borrow a furniture van to transport patients who were too big for the standard equipment.

"We would go to the nearest hospital with a furniture van and pick up a hospital bed and go out with the fire service, using salvage sheets, and virtually drag the patient on to a hospital bed," he said.

"We had no other means of doing it."

In the past eight years, however, SA Ambulance had become a national leader in the handling and transport of patients over 150kg, resulting in a more organised response to call-outs and more dignity for patients.

Mr Clarke said the new equipment and procedures had eliminated injuries to ambulance officers and patients.

SA Ambulance now has two heavy-duty stretchers which can take more than 300kg, compared with the standard 150kg stretcher.

The total cost of the new van and equipment, due to start operation later this year, would be about \$300,000.

The average transfer, from call-out to hospital, took just under two hours.

Because of the delay, an intensive care paramedic would often be the first to be dispatched, to care for the clinical needs of the patient, while a second team made arrangements for retrieval.

Mr Clarke said SA Ambulance had "a long tradition of being innovative" and had advised most interstate ambulance services on bariatric transport.

A Health Department spokesman said most hospital beds could not take the heaviest patients.

A standard bed cost about \$2400 and could take up to 180kg but the strongest and most specialised bed could cost up to \$35,000.

The Queen Elizabeth Hospital has 20 beds rated up to 270kg and the Royal Adelaide Hospital has one bed rated up to 450kg.



Heavy duty ... SA is getting an ambulance like this one.

Copyright 2007 News Limited. All times ACDT (GMT +10:30).

ï¿½\$

(http://mercury.tiser.com.au/accipiter/adclick/CID=ffffffcffffffcffffffc/acc_random=79839627/SITE=ADV/AREA=NEWS)