

Ambulance delay cause for concern

By Krista Conrad

Staff Reporter

One hour and 52 minutes.

That's how long it took Mike Olfert to arrive at a Calgary hospital after being stung by a hornet at his acreage south of Okotoks.

It was a scary situation for Olfert and his family with a series of delays that nearly cost him his life. He was stung around 1 p.m. and immediately went into anaphylactic shock, passing in and out of consciousness.

His family was arriving at the house for a get-together and his daughter and daughter-in-law – both nurses – tended to him and made the call to 911. It took about 25 minutes for help to arrive on-scene.

"On Google maps, if you put the farthest fire station and our address, it should be 16 minutes driving the speed limit," said Olfert. "It just took so long for the ambulance to get there."

In the meantime, his pulse was weakening. By the time the first of two ambulances arrived, Olfert's daughter had no pulse in his wrist but could feel a weak pulse in his neck.

Olfert praised the paramedics who attended the scene as "miracle workers" who saved his life. By the time they arrived his blood pressure had dropped to 30/20 and his skin was ashen.

"They did an amazing job pumping fluids into me, and I think there were three epipens in my leg, plus all the other drugs and whatever else it took," said Olfert. "They absolutely saved my life and did a great job."

It would still be more than an hour before he would arrive at a



BRENT CALVER/OWW

Mike Olfert went into anaphylactic shock after being stung by a hornet on his acreage south of Okotoks and it took an hour and 52 minutes for him to be transported to Calgary's South Health Campus.

hospital. It was 1:35 p.m. when STARS Air Ambulance was dispatched. The helicopter arrived at 2:01 p.m., and by 2:30 p.m. Olfert was en route to South Health Campus hospital. He arrived at 2:52 p.m.

Olfert was kept overnight at the hospital but said the next morning it was as though nothing ever happened. He'll be taking shots to build his immunity to wasp and hornet stings for the next five years, but he is now otherwise unscathed.

It's frightening to think of how close it was to being a bad ending, he said. His daughter was just a minute away from having to perform CPR, he said.

Olfert said he intends to speak with Alberta Health Services (AHS) about the incident. He said it shouldn't have taken so long for help to reach him, and he wants to prevent similar situations in the future.

Suzanne Oel, chair of Foothills Regional Emergency Services Commission (FRESC), said it appears there were a few reasons for the delay, and some are cause for concern.

First, she said the call

originated from a voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) phone. Due to the VoIP provider, the call was first connected to Northern 911 before being transferred to Foothills 911 at 1:06:26 p.m., she said.

To assist with timing, particularly for VoIP or rural residents, she said it's important for callers to immediately state the municipality they are actually in. For those in the country, it's important to name the municipal district or county rather than the nearest urban centre.

FRESC sounded the alarm about rural ambulance dispatch in May citing incidents where dispatch problems were leading to potentially life-threatening delays. Alberta Health Minister Sarah Hoffman said at the time she would monitor ambulance dispatch in rural areas.

Nick Thain, executive director of EMS operations for AHS, said it's not unusual for a response to a rural community to take longer due to travel distance. Though it took upwards of four minutes for an ambulance to be dispatched from

the time the call was first transferred from Northern 911, he said AHS EMS acted in a timely manner from the moment they took over the call.

"We verified the address and notified the closest ambulance in less than 90 seconds, which is the benchmark time," said Thain in a written statement. "We also arrived on-scene in under 17 minutes, also well within our benchmark time for rural responses."

According to an AHS timeline transcript of the event provided to the *Western Wheel* by Olfert, Foothills 911 forwarded the call to AHS emergency services dispatch at the South Calgary Centre (SCC) at 1:07:17 p.m. At 1:10:16 p.m. AHS EMS dispatch created an official event. At that time, the address still had not been verified, and it took at least two minutes to get the right location.

Oel said this could be partly due to the caller initially saying the address was on Clear Mountain Drive in Okotoks rather than specifying the MD of Foothills. However, she said the CAD system at Foothills 911

Response timeline (p.m.)	
1:06:26	- Foothills 911 receives call from Northern 911
1:07:17	- AHS EMS dispatch answered call transferred from Northern 911
1:09:16	- Foothills 911 releases call to AHS
1:10:16	- AHS EMS event created
1:10:26	- Ambulance notified cold response, address verification still in progress
1:10:38	- Address verification still in progress
1:11:19	- Address verification still in progress
1:12:40	- Ambulance 1 en route, address verification still in progress
1:13:22	- Event changed from cold to hot
1:13:40	- Ambulance in hot response
1:13:41	- Second unit recommended
1:15:54	- Patient moved to recovery position and breathing better
1:17:29	- Second unit hot response
1:19:18	- Ambulance ETA 5 minutes
1:21:56	- STARS will wait for EMS update
1:23:09	- Patient pulse getting weak
1:25:59	- Ambulance 1 arrives
1:26:58	- Ambulance 2 arrives
1:32:33	- Request STARS launch
1:33:39	- Request fire
1:35:20	- STARS dispatched ETA 25 minutes
2:01:04	- STARS skids down
2:30:53	- STARS en route to South Health Campus
2:52:40	- STARS arrives at South Health Campus
3:02:34	- Event closed

immediately pinpointed the address as being in the MD, so it's unclear what the issue could have been at the SCC.

"Our computer verified right away, we knew right away it wasn't in Okotoks," said Oel.

In fact, when FRESC picked up the call to have fire sent to the scene to assist with STARS landing, she said they were dispatched within 51 seconds.


In an emergency situation every second counts, said Oel.

"Just try holding your



breath for a minute and a half and then see how long that time period of 20 minutes is," she said.

Despite response issues, Thain said AHS is proud of how the emergency was handled. He said AHS continued to work with FRESC to review calls in the Foothills.

"Both AHS and FRESC have agreed to review how each dispatch centre hands calls off to one another and is examining the technical links that can be improved," said Thain.



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Commentary

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Editorial

Rural dispatch needs to improve

Every second counts in an emergency.

Whether its a heart attack, stroke, accident, or like in MD of Foothills resident Mike Olferts case a severe allergic reaction, time is of the essence when someones life hangs in the balance.

A perfect storm of errors caused delay in getting paramedics to Olfert and getting him to a hospital. First, the emergency call went to Northern 911 because it was made from a VoIP phone.

An EMS dispatch couldnt verify the address for several minutes because the location was reported as Okotoks rather than the MD.

It took an hour and 52 minutes from when Northern 911 transferred the call to Foothills 911 until Olfert arrived at South Health Campus hospital. He was treated and is now healthy, but it was a close call.

Olferts family could have taken him to either High River Hospital or South Health Campus in a fraction of the time. But, this comes with its own risks if his condition had worsened on the way.

Something needs to be done. Its not about the paramedics, who Olfert himself credits as miracle workers.

Its about dispatch and response times.

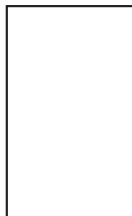
Yes, Olfert lives on an acreage south of Okotoks, and rural response times are expected to be longer than calls from within urban town or city limits.

The main concern stems from a lack of knowledge of the area by EMS dispatch at the South Calgary Centre, where the computer couldnt locate Clear Mountain Drive. When Foothills 911 took the call, operators and the CAD system both knew the address was in the MD.

The Province continues to say its monitoring the situation and working with Foothills Regional Emergency Services Commission to improve communications, but there needs to be action sooner than later.

One more minute could have turned this life-saving story into a nightmare.

Hooray for back to school



Rockley's
Rambles
**Matt
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Publisher

we get here already? Its a funny thing because it doesnt seem that long ago that I was in junior high. I remember being nervous going into that first day of Grade 7. Once I got there and saw all of my friends and met my wonderful homeroom teacher the nerves faded away.

Best of luck to all the students, teachers and parents as we get back into the school year.

A man walks into a bar and says, Give me a beer before the problems start!

He drinks the beer and then orders another saying, Give me a beer before the problems start!

The bartender looks confused. The boss said to her employees one day, Please stand up, anyone who thinks theyre stupid.

Nobody stood up so the boss said, With all of the mistakes lately Im sure there are some stupid people in this room!

At this point Eric stood up. The boss said, Oh Eric! Youre willing to admit youre stupid then?

Eric replied, No, I just felt bad that you were standing up on your own.

Its that wonderful time of year when parents rejoice! Summer break is over and students are heading back to school. Sorry kids, its the law.

Saying that children grow up fast is such a cliché that its hard to take the statement seriously but Im really feeling it this year. My oldest is on to junior high and Im asking myself; How did

Safety starts behind the wheel



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Brent Calver
Staff
Photographer

and nearly collide head-on with me because they were unhappy a school bus was going slower (buses do 90 as a rule). As for the road, last week has shown that collisions will occur no matter what lines are painted where, and it was reportedly nearly a head-on collision.

Changing the speed limit will do nothing unless drivers abide, while twinning may take decades and wont do much to change the safety of the intersections. Lowering the speed wont change anything because its been shown that drivers will default to an acceptable speed.

The worst spot is at Big Rock Trails intersection with

Highway 7.

While it may initially be unpopular, one of the most effective solutions may be a roundabout, similar to Highway 22 and Highway 8. According to Alberta Transportation, they result in reduced collisions, a 90 per cent reduction in fatalities, 80 per cent reduction in injuries, and a complete elimination of head-on and high speed collisions.

The argument that people dont know how to use them is about as valid as pleading ignorance to any other law, although clear indicators are important. Until a solution is found, the best improvements are those made by the ones behind the wheel.

In the course of my work Im routinely making trips on the many roads of the MD of Foothills, including our very own Fury Road: Highway 7.

The road has many laws that come up for debate with every collision. The greatest law is easily human behaviour. Distracted driving aside, Ive had people angry pass coming the other way