

Aptos firemen, Dominican organize paramedic program

The Aptos fire department is preparing to start its own paramedic service.

Agreement has been reached with Dominican Hospital administrators for physicians and emergency room nurses to work with paramedic-trained firemen who respond to medical emergencies within the mid-county fire district.

Fire district directors last week voted to \$16,218 for the special radio and other electronic equipment needed to link the paramedics to the hospital.

Three firemen are now completing the last weeks of their hospital training at Dominican Hospital, and will be going to Los Angeles June 1 for two months of intensive field training as paramedics.

The program — regarded as an experiment in Santa Cruz County to test the need for a program that has been successful elsewhere in California — has been endorsed by the Santa Cruz County Fire Chiefs Association.

Aptos Fire Chief Richard Chinn plans to present the plan to the county Emergency Medical Care Commission Friday for its endorsement. The Commission last year endorsed a similar plan for two private ambulance companies to provide paramedic service in the city of Santa Cruz and throughout the midcounty, including Aptos, Soquel, Live Oak and Capitola.

That proposal was killed by the board of supervisors because it would have increased the medical bills paid by the county

in the case of indigents and other county-responsibility patients.

Supervisors remain the major legal roadblock to the Aptos proposal, which will be funded by the district's residents.

Chinn said this week that the ambulance companies will continue to transport patients to the hospitals — except when a doctor decides that the time doesn't allow an ambulance to reach the scene.

The basic paramedic service will be "free" to the district's inhabitants. The county could be asked to pay for the ambulance trip — a charge it now pays in many cases. Any drugs used by the paramedics, Chinn adds, will be billed to the patient by the hospital, which provided the drugs in the first place.

Aptos needs the approval of the board of supervisors because only acting County Health Officer Dr. Joseph Craig can permit paramedics to operate in the county.

And, under state law, the county is the only agency that can

contract with a hospital — Dominican in this case — to be a base hospital. Such a contract, he said, does not require any money to exchange hands.

Chinn expects fireman Phil Scofield — who was the first Santa Cruz County resident to complete the paramedic course at Stanford University — and firemen Greg Joseph and Terry Gritton to complete their field training in Los Angeles by August.

The department, in the meanwhile, will be acquiring and refurbishing a van that will be used by the paramedics stationed at the Rio Del Mar fire station.

To get the money for the van — about \$11,000 — and to pay a portion of the equipment cost, the district directors last week authorized Chinn to sell the department's seldom-used mini-pumper.

The pumper, acquired shortly after Chinn took over the department.

Minimum price for the truck — if you want to buy it — is \$23,000.