The planning, implementation, and management of Emergency Medical Services (EMS) systems historically have been influenced by local political, cultural, and economic conditions with minimal consideration given to the role of EMS as the initial provider of care in the health care continuum. Recently, evidence-based research has proven the potential of EMS for reducing mortality, and as a result, expectations have increased in the governmental and medical communities.

To meet expectations while maintaining economic viability, EMS systems continually must assess performance and outcomes. The development of performance indicators is the foundation for establishing strategies for planning and implementing an effective EMS delivery system. The identification of accurate data sources, establishment of predetermined measurement intervals, and the reporting of relevant information are prerequisite for establishing effective performance indicators.

Once developed, performance indicators assess current performance, identify existing and potential problems, and assist in the proactive development of solutions. Understanding performance indicators and their application can impact all phases of EMS administration. The measurement of basic and advanced clinical procedures, response methodologies, response time intervals, resource development and utilization, and cost per transport are specific indicators that provide necessary tools for system management. Results from studying these specific components, along with others, then can be reviewed collectively to help establish a strategy for the design and implementation of an optimum system design that meets the needs of the patient and community.

Keywords: emergency medical services; EMS; performance indicators; planning; outcome.