

Rock Ambulance hires Wash U doctor for medical director role

By Laura Marlow
For the Leader

Rock Township Ambulance District's new medical director, hired in September 2019, is devoting one day a week to the part-time job, an upgrade for the position, said Deputy Chief Andrew West, the district's medical officer.

"You have to have a medical director, by law," West said. "We learn all the guidelines for patient care as paramedics, but you still have to have a doctor's orders. "We had one from Mercy Hospital South; but he was hardly ever here, and there were only slight changes every couple of years. Now, we will not only have the latest up-to-date protocols, we have onsite advice and instruction in evidence-based practices."

The district's contract with Dr. Jeffrey Siegler, 37, of St. Louis County, a staff physician with the Department of Emergency Medicine at Washington University in St. Louis, calls for him to receive \$25,000 a year. He will spend one day per week onsite, as well as do phone and online consulting as needed.

District officials say the hire is part of the district's ongoing efforts to streamline patient care and make operations as efficient as possible, as call volume continues to rise.

"Five months in, we are very happy with the direction we're headed," West said. "We have already implemented several changes, and will continue to do so to help give our community the best emergency medicine possible."

West said Siegler offers customized assistance and instruction to the district, in place of the one-size-fits-all service the district had been getting.

"Having an individual versus being part of a hospital system means whatever (Siegler) does is designed for just us in mind, versus something that is developed for a whole system," West said. "And, because of his connections with Wash U, we have physician involvement we never had before."

Rock Ambulance Chief Jerry Appleton said that aspect was made visible recently in Kimmswick.

"We have a group of physicians who



Dr. Jeffrey Siegler

are doing training for us – onsite, online direction, written protocols," he said.

"They came to the Apple Butter Festival, and we were able to have a true first aid capability for the first time."

Appleton said the district will recoup part of its cost for Siegler's services by eliminating the need for outside training and consultant services.

"It will significantly reduce our training budget," he said. "And it gives us hands-on, constant feedback on ways to provide better medical care."

"(Siegler) has helped us improve quality and manpower in terms of training, of paperwork," West said. "And it gives us continuity in training."

"It really helps, having somebody onsite to say, 'I want you to do it this way; that is what will be best for this district's particular circumstances,' versus the outside trainer who says, 'Do it this way because that's what the book says.'"

"We've been able to get rid of equipment and medications that weren't needed, or use them in more efficient ways. It's no longer, 'We've always done it this way'; we figure out how we can do it better."

West said Siegler is one of 10 board-certified EMS physicians on the Washington University staff, all of them potential resources for Rock.

"If we were to have a mass casualty incident, for example, we can call the physician line and they would respond to our scene," West said. "And, because they're available to us, they would be available to the whole county."