

IAMTCS Position Statement

Recommended Standards for Safe Communications Staffing in Medical Transport Operations

Established by the IAMTCS Board of Directors

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Purpose

The International Association of Medical Transport Communication Specialists (IAMTCS) establishes the following staffing standards to promote safety, operational efficiency, and workforce well-being in medical transport communications. These guidelines define the maximum safe workload for communications specialists responsible for both flight and ground operations, ensuring that staffing models protect personnel, patients, and mission outcomes.

Recommended Maximum Staffing Ratio

IAMTCS recommends a **maximum ratio of three aircraft per one dedicated communications specialist (3:1)** to maintain safe, effective, and sustainable operations.

This ratio assumes the specialist's sole responsibility is core dispatch and flight-following duties, retaining the capacity to manage a single in-flight emergency without compromising oversight of other active assets.

Core Duties Supported by the 3:1 Ratio

The 3:1 ratio is based on the workload required to safely manage the following essential responsibilities:

- Basic intake and call processing
- Flight tracking and dispatch
- Notification management (hospitals, counties, and partner agencies)
- Ground transport coordination

- Flight-following inbound aircraft to receiving facilities

These represent the **minimum essential functions** necessary for safe oversight and coordination of medical transport operations.

Minimum Staffing Requirement — No Fewer Than Two

IAMTCS **strongly recommends** that no communications center operate with fewer than **two communications specialists on duty at any time**. This is a **non-negotiable baseline** for safety and workforce well-being.

Two-person coverage is necessary to:

- Maintain continuous oversight during breaks or temporary absences
- Support mental health and reduce fatigue
- Provide immediate assistance during emergent events
- Prevent cognitive overload and human error

If a program operates with only one specialist per shift, a **formally documented contingency policy** must exist. Such a policy must **not** rely on unsafe practices such as:

- Carrying radios or communication equipment into restrooms
- Expecting staff to forgo breaks or basic human needs
- Remaining “on duty” without practical relief options

Instead, programs must ensure that policies:

- Include clear, routinely drilled contingency protocols
- Define procedures for temporary coverage during brief absences
- Empower communications staff to initiate a **Safety Stand Down** when safe monitoring capacity is compromised

Failure to provide these safeguards constitutes a **serious safety risk** and is **incompatible with IAMTCS best practices**.

Impact of Fleet Size on Staffing Needs

Fleet size directly affects flight concurrency, communications workload, and redundancy. Therefore, the 3:1 ratio must be applied within the context of each program’s operational scale:

Program Size Flyable Assets Operational Consideration

Small	1–3	High probability of full activation; limited redundancy
Medium	4–9	May require adjusted ratios aligned with OCC standards
Large	10–24	Supports layered staffing and role specialization
Supercenter	25+	High specialization; lower proportional activation rates

Larger programs benefit from overlapping shifts and peer coverage. Smaller programs face greater workload intensity and higher operational strain when all aircraft are active.

Duties That Require Additional Staffing

If communications specialists perform duties **beyond core dispatch and flight-following functions**, staffing must be re-evaluated based on the complexity and time demands of these additional tasks. Examples include:

- Transfer center or patient logistics operations
- **Non-flight asset coordination** (security, truck, or ground dispatch)
- 911 or emergency call handling
- Administrative or support functions (documentation, administrative lines, pad management)
- Monitoring incoming patient or non-patient flight reports
- Managing specialty transports or interfacility coordination

Each added responsibility increases cognitive load and divides attention—particularly during high-tempo or emergent events. Staffing models must account for these additional duties to maintain safe decision-making and situational awareness.

Conclusion

The **3:1 ratio** represents the **maximum safe workload** for a communications specialist under standard operating conditions. Operating below this staffing level—or without adequate relief and contingency coverage—introduces unacceptable risk to patients, flight crews, and communications staff.

As medical transport operations evolve in complexity and scope, staffing models must adapt accordingly. IAMTCS urges all organizations to uphold these standards as part of a **safety-centered, sustainable communications model** that protects the mission, the workforce, and those they serve.