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State receives report recommending improvements to trauma system

American College of Surgeons submitted report after November 2008 visit to Alaska

(Anchorage, AK) — The state Department of Health and Social Services received a report from the American College of Surgeons recommending more than 70 ways to improve the trauma response in Alaska. The full report is now public and available at:

http://www.chems.alaska.gov/EMS/Assets/Trauma_Center/ASC-Trauma-Recs.pdf.

A committee of representatives from the American College of Surgeons, a scientific and educational organization for surgeons, visited Alaska in early November to study the state's trauma response and provide recommendations for improving it to help save lives and prevent devastating outcomes that threaten Alaskans' quality of life and ability to work. While recognizing the challenges of providing trauma care in Alaska, the committee also praised the ingenuity of the state's health-care providers.

"Clearly the 'Last Frontier' is challenged with issues of geography, remoteness, inclement weather and limited health care resources," the report reads. "State and regional leaders, along with a wide ranging cadre of health care providers are to be congratulated for their efforts to achieve the trauma system mantra of 'getting the right patient to the right place in the right amount of time.'"

With Alaska's injury-related death rates higher than in other parts of the country, improving trauma care is a priority for the department, said Dr. Jay Butler, Alaska's Chief Medical Officer. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in its most recent statistics that unintentional injuries — such as injuries caused by car accidents and drowning — were the fifth most common cause of death for U.S. residents of all ages. Unintentional injuries are the third most common cause of death in Alaska, following cancer and heart disease, Butler said.

"We have reduced the number of deaths caused by some types of trauma through prevention," Butler said. "However, it is not possible to prevent all injuries so we want to ensure that injured Alaskans can get the best medical care possible as fast as possible."

The American College of Surgeons report included the following recommendations:

- Add all acute-care hospitals to the state trauma system within two years.
- Establish a second Level II Trauma Center in Anchorage to meet the state's needs; to date, the only Level II Trauma Center in Alaska is the Alaska Native Medical Center.

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- Integrate the trauma system into state and local disaster planning exercises.
- Develop a central coordination center for medical aircraft used in Alaska and monitor the availability and location of such aircraft.

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