



## MEDS-1 Ambulance Service, Grand Rapids, MN

Director of Operations Elisa Hughes was no stranger to digital scheduling, nor being part of a “connected” work team when she found Aladtec in late 2018.

Given that her 55-member team typically responds to a dozen calls daily from stations separated by 45 miles of northern Minnesota forest, clear communications are a must. MEDS-1 Ambulance members and leaders were already using a cloud-based intranet application named “Basecamp” to conduct daily “Muster” meetings, share shift instructions, and specific duty assignments. A “Kudos” room on the app provides a stage to share patient compliments and recognize great member performance.

But the digital scheduler she was using to create and manage 24/7 schedules for EMTs and paramedics remained a painful process.

The product was “just a difficult platform to manage. We had it for a year. I was finally getting to a certain comfort zone with it. That’s just a really long time. And there were still just a lot of things that I wasn’t comfortable doing, but I had a grasp of it. It was OK. I muddled through it every day.”

She later told Aladtec representative Brad Parmeter the other platform was very time-consuming to use and wasn’t user-friendly. It lacked visual differentiation between BLS & ALS schedules, had a problematic shift-setup process, didn’t offer multiple pay codes, and the technical support wasn’t always efficient nor supportive.

One September day, Hughes accepted an incoming call from an Aladtec representative, inviting her to trial Aladtec via a free demonstration.

She’d heard of Aladtec through neighboring services but had already invested a lot of time

### Neighboring agencies also using Aladtec:

Essentia Health EMS-Deer River; Remer Area Ambulance Service, Remer; Nashwauk Ambulance Service, Nashwauk; Hibbing Police Dept., Hibbing; Chisholm Ambulance Association & Longyear Inc., Chisholm; Eveleth Ambulance Service, Eveleth; Virginia Fire, Police and City of Virginia; Cloquet Police Dept., Cloquet; Carlton County Sheriff’s Office, Carlton; North Memorial, Brainerd; St Louis County Jail, Duluth; Bemidji Ambulance Service, Bemidji; Bois Forte Ambulance, Nett Lake; North Memorial Park Rapids Walker Ambulance, Park Rapids; Lake County Ambulance Service, Two Harbors; Ely Area Ambulance Service, Ely; and Essentia Health EMS-Sandstone.



### Department Info:

**Roster:** 55 members, all EMTs, EMT-I’s and paramedics.

**Calls:** About 4,400 in 2018.

**Service area:** Approx. 3,000 sq. miles hilly, heavily wooded, studded with about 1,400 lakes and ponds, 45,500 population.

**Apparatus:** Five ALS ambulances, two stations - 46 miles apart.

**Challenges:** Marked population increase in warmer months with seasonal residents and visitors.

**Special skills:** Rope and swiftwater rescue, haz-mat, confined space, and a specialized gross- and fine decontamination unit for the region.

**Aladtec users since late 2018.**

integrating data and learning the other program. Switching to a new program would mean starting all over again.

Hughes logged onto Basecamp to ask members what they thought. “I polled all of our employees and said, ‘We’re looking for a new scheduling program. Do any of you have any suggestions?’ I would safely say, 90 percent of (responding) employees said “Aladtec.”

“In EMS, you have a certain percentage that does this full-time, but you always have a percentage who work day jobs, and they do this for fun. I’m really dumbing that down a lot, but a lot of our people work part-time at other services. We also have full-time staff who came to us from other places where they were familiar with using Aladtec. They said ‘I have experience with Aladtec and it’s just a great program.’”

***“The biggest advantage of Aladtec versus (the previous program), it’s much more user-friendly, across the board for all of our employees. I do the most with Aladtec here, and even for me, it’s so much more intuitive to use.”***

MEDS-1 owners Jim and Suzanne Ducharme purchased the firm from Kevin McNichols who founded the business in 1978.

Jim, an engineer by training, and Suzanne, who worked in long-term care, moved north from the Twin Cities about 15 years ago to realize their dream of raising their children near extended family and enjoying the beautiful area where they loved to vacation.

Jim was familiar with emergency services work through relatives who were professional firefighters in St. Paul. He decided to take a four-month EMT class at MEDS-1 to get his foot in the door. Jim soon discovered the fulfillment many find within emergency medical services work. He applied for a job and was hired by MEDS-1 in 2010.

After a year working part-time as an EMT, teaching emergency services classes and still pinch-hitting as an engineer, Jim pursued and earned a paramedic degree. He was soon named the MEDS-1 education coordinator.

When McNichols began openly discussing his plans to sell the business as a path into retirement, Jim and Suzanne expressed interest, and an agreement was struck.

The Ducharme’s willingness to retain some of MEDS-1’s core values (remaining a family-run business with the same dedication to the community the McNichols’ had cultivated) helped secure the deal, according to a profile shared by their lender, Grand Rapids State Bank.

After the purchase, Jim had to work through the transition from being a “coworker” to “the boss.”

“I was able to use technology to our advantage,” Jim told the writer. “I’m 46 years old, and we have quite a few 20-somethings working here. We actually did some homework on how to communicate with and

manage millennials, and we are glad we did.

“We learned that we needed to explain our business plan and to help them see the big picture of what we were doing and why we were doing it. We told employees about every step,” he said, describing the role Basecamp has played in communications.

“Kevin did a great job building this company to what it was when we bought it,” said Jim, “and we need to work with the people here—a new generation of employees—to move the company forward.”

Local fire departments in the region are first-responder agencies (EMR or EMT-level) for emergencies paged out within their district. MEDS-1 provides the ALS-level response, said Hughes. “We have a very good relationship with the (Grand Rapids) hospital. We get transfer requests from many other hospitals: Deer River, Hibbing, Virginia. We go as far as Cook, Aurora, and Ely (105 miles to the north,) as well as Duluth, the Twin Cities, Rochester, Thief River Falls, and Fargo. We’ve gotten requests from all of those places.”

Community paramedic services, and providing medical training for businesses and organizations, are also part of MEDS-1’s business model.

Aladtec plays a role in providing the connectivity that employees have come to expect, said Hughes.

“On the system we had before, say there was a (24-hour) shift we had difficulty filling, and we needed to split it between two people. Anything like that involved me going into the program first, and doing that, in order for someone to be able to fill half a shift. So, from my boss’s perspective, I was putting in far too many man-hours into the scheduling program to get what we needed to have done.

“Our employees are free to go on and do so much more. And all I have to do is go on and approve it. I don’t have to set it up before them being able to make the request and then approve it. That’s a big advantage.”

Pricewise, Aladtec was competitive, said Hughes.

“You were very comparable. And while, initially, what we paid monthly is a bit more, because you offer more, it ends up really working.

“For instance, the forms that you have, that’s been a time-saver for us because we have all of our rig-check forms, our incident reports -- because we can use a lot of that and it saves a lot. That was a big selling point,” Hughes said.

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## Elisa Hughes

Elisa Hughes is a paramedic and Director of Operations at MEDS-1. She studied at the University of Minnesota - Morris, and Itasca Community College.