

History of EMS

The modern EMS System began to take shape in the U.S. during the 1960s following the publication of a report titled "Accidental Death and Disability: The Neglected Disease of Modern Society," by the National Research Council.¹As we progressed through the 1970s and '80s, Americans were provided prehospital care by trained members of local ambulance corps, police or fire departments. Throughout the late 20th century, many developments in medicine and emergency medical care created the need for additional training, certification and continuing education for pre-hospital providers. With these industry developments, volunteer EMS agencies began to decline as volunteer members found it difficult to meet these new requirements.

Across the nation, training requirements have increased to support the expectations for the EMT. No matter how low the call volume, ambulances still need to be fully equipped and personnel properly trained and ready to respond at a moment's notice. It is not just answering the call for a heart attack or a motor vehicle incident; EMS are on stand-by for athletic and community events, completing welfare checks and responding to opioid overdoses. The expectation in rural area is that the EMS is available anytime, for anything, anywhere.

Our capability to provide adequate pre-hospital care to citizens in need across the country has become greatly diminished. The current staffing shortages in EMS have taxed our response system, increased response times and left patients without adequate levels of care. The average interval between a call to 911 and arrival of EMS is 7 minutes.² This interval can as much as triple in rural areas according to the results of a 2015 study published in JAMA Surgery. For these cases of severe bleeding, life-threatening allergic reactions, cardio-pulmonary arrest or other time sensitive illnesses, the only thing worse than having to wait 30 minutes for EMS is for no EMS to respond. This is the path that we are on in rural Wisconsin and until everyone is made aware of the problem and measures are taken to stave off the impending disaster, the current EMS system will continue to collapse around us.

1. National Academy of Sciences—National Research Council Committees on Trauma and Shock. Accidental Death and Disability: The Neglected Disease of Modern Society. National Research Council: Washington, D.C., 1966.
2. JAMA Surgery—Emergency Medical Service Response Times in Rural, Suburban and Urban Areas, July 19, 2017.