

Friday Night (under the) Lights...

Twenty twenty-three.



Happy Friday...

And, more importantly, a very happy Friday of EMS Week...

So - *This is our week.* It's a time of the year when all heads turn toward the entire emergency healthcare system and reflect on the importance of what we do and the people that do it.

You probably know this, but EMS Week was established by President Gerald Ford in 1974. That makes this year the 49th anniversary (I debated whether to add that in because I remember the first EMS Week – No comments...). The theme this week is “Where emergency care begins”.

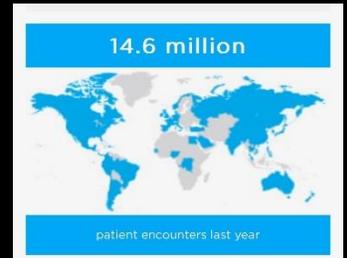
So, if you're reading this, in some form or fashion, you are a part of the EMS Family. The overwhelming majority of you end up directly interacting with our patients during the time we care for them - EMTs, paramedics, nurses, dispatchers, physicians, pilots, EMRs, respiratory therapists and even a few pharmacists! The rest of us support the care process before, during and after the patient encounter – air & ground mechanics, supply staff, purchasing, IT structure and support, research, finance, compliance, logistics, facilities, safety, administration and all the good lawyers (by definition, if you're on our side – you're a “good” lawyer 😊).

When you think about it – a well-oiled EMS machine depends on an enormous amount of coordination and integration to be effective.



Right now, for example, I could stop typing, pick up my cell phone, call 911 and tell them “something isn’t right and I need help”. Chances are good they will know generally where I am (cell phone triangulation) and the number I’m calling from (which gives them a name). Even if I say nothing more, the emergency medical dispatcher will continue to try and get more information about what’s going on while the closest appropriate units (ambulance, first response) are assigned to where I am based on appropriate geolocation. The individuals that are on the way to me will be appropriately trained and equipped to assess and manage my anatomy & physiology and formulate a plan for the next steps in improving whatever is wrong with me, including moving me in the right amount of time to the right facility to care for me.

When you think about my little Captain Obvious description above, we do this every single day. As a matter of fact, in our organization, we do this almost 14,600,000 times a year. Because I’m so good at math, I can tell you that we have a patient encounter every 2 seconds (give or take a few milliseconds here or there…).



And for the record, if I actually did call 911 right now, I would tell them I was just trying to prove a point for my FNuL and they would certainly add a Sheriff’s Deputy to the call without me even asking!)

I bring this up because sometimes we’re so used to what we do all the time that we forget the magic of it. What a gift it is to be part of a system that can get to you, wherever you are, whatever is wrong with you and whatever time it is and maximize your chances of a good outcome.

So yes, this year’s EMS Week theme is spot on – “Where emergency care begins”.

But even better – we are the very front of the front line of healthcare. It’s us.

And if you were to ask me to pick one emotion that describes what we do – Our profession – it would, without a doubt be *Pride*.

The dictionary tells us that pride is “a feeling of deep pleasure or satisfaction derived from one’s own achievements, the achievements of those with whom one is closely associated, or from qualities or possessions that are widely admired”.

So tonight, I want to do something a bit different. It feels a bit sterile to just say “Happy EMS Week” and/or, “I’m really proud of you”.

I want to try and tell you all the reasons why.

Sort of an Evidence Based Approach to Pride, if you will…

So here goes…

First, I'm proud of you for choosing this profession in the first place.

There are plenty of other healthcare professions. There are jobs with better hours. There are professions which have nights, weekends, holidays and snow days off. There are professions that pay more or don't require work outside in the elements. There are professions that don't deal with angry people or hostile environments or are always predictable. There are jobs that don't deal with intensively emotional circumstances. There are jobs where children don't die. There are jobs that aren't as physically demanding. Or don't require always taking care of problems. Most jobs have well defined lunch breaks or dinner breaks or just break breaks.

And there are jobs where the worst smell all day is mid-morning coffee.

But not ours. Our biggest priority (after we are clearly safe) is to take care of the people we're called to help. In the rain. When we're tired. And haven't had lunch.

I'm really really proud of that. And very few other professions have that deep level of commitment. It's arguably the hardest profession in acute care medicine (and by the way, it's the front of the front line...).



I'm proud of our ability to focus on both the art & science of what we do.

I'm a strong believer in the art of medicine. Study after study has demonstrated the value of a caregiver's interaction with their patient and how that interaction can change an outcome or improve the circumstances at hand.

One of the best in EMS? *Calm.*

Most people don't wake up in the morning and plan to get T-boned at an intersection, or have a big MI before lunch, or lose the distal tip of a finger in the restaurant chopped salad (had to throw that one in to wig you out a bit...).

So when something acute, something that's not normal or expected suddenly happens it creates substantial distress. The calm, reassuring words we provide while we evaluate and care for them sends a message that we aren't as worried as they are. And they know we've seen a lot. So that feeling of calm helps foster a sense of wellbeing.

And we know that a sense of calm facilitates a better caregiver-patient connection, it builds trust, and it decreases anxiety.

Think I'm kidding? Next time you see a simple strain / sprain, open your eyes real wide, look at the patient and exclaim as loudly as you can to your partner – "WE NEED TO GO NOW!!!!".

Of course I'm joking. J.O.K.I.N.G...

I'm really proud of your ability to connect with the patients emotions while tending to their illness or injury.

I'm proud of your willingness to ask questions, challenge approaches and always think about different and better ways to do things.

This is somewhat related to the art & science discussion above. The delivery of care in our world is quite complex. We learn a lot about better approaches from the people that actually do it.

EMS Providers, as a group, are certainly not shy. Asking questions forces us all to look at all the potential answers and often opens the door to better practices.

I've said all my career to my physician colleagues that one of the most powerful, positive questions a medical director can get from his or her field partners is "can I run something by you that I'm not sure I did right"?

I'm proud of our ability to honestly question anything and everything.

I'm proud of how we take care of each other when the going gets rough.

It's no secret that EMS is physically, emotionally, mentally & spiritually challenging (see above,...). But over the years, I've come to really love the connection in an EMS Family.

We usually know when someone is struggling and I am not aware of anywhere else in medicine where an organization and a group of co-workers can come together to help our own. It's why the ED is packed when one of our own is involved in a crash. It's why we ask our coworkers if everything is OK if they're just not themselves.

Its why (and this one is extremely hard for me) EMS Memorial Services are packed with family, friends and strangers – in perfectly pressed uniforms, crisp aircraft and vehicles and a ritual of grieving and support to help the survivors, and our profession move on as best we can.

As hard as this one is, I'm extremely proud of the bonds an EMS culture creates.

I'm proud of the [sometimes sick] sense of humor and the ability to have fun.

This one is really important to me. Truth be told, I believe it's one of the most powerful tools to deal with stressful circumstances on the planet.

Plus – we know that laughter and humor (appropriately used) can de-escalate tense situations, increase job satisfaction, improve productivity and improve our physiology.

I would argue that humor is an important part of our profession (I'll write a lot more about this in a future FNuL)...

I remember years ago, there was a tension between two shifts at an EMS station in Austin. It was apparently pretty ugly.

This particular station had an A, B & C shift. And each shift had a refrigerator.

One morning, at shift change, the A shift paramedic supervisor pulled out a 3 gallon tub of his ice cream (Blue Bell Rocky Road if I remember correctly), opened it up, spit in it and said to the oncoming shift: " Just in case you get any ideas, this is MY ice cream."

His B shift colleague stepped up, spit in the same bucket and said "I'll share it with you".

And from that point forward, the stories and pranks from both A & B shift became legendary.

I'm proud of our ability to laugh whenever we can. There certainly are enough tough times to take care of...

So... Happy EMS Week to all of you.

One more thing from the definition of pride. Remember - "a feeling of deep pleasure or satisfaction derived from one's own achievements, the achievements of those with whom one is closely associated, or from qualities or possessions that are widely admired".

My pride tonight is soundly routed in "...*the achievements of those with whom one is closely associated...*"

I'm really grateful for that.

I wish all of you a happy Memorial Day weekend...

But, of course. I can't forget the ever important epilogue for tonight...

- Epilogue...

I ran across this sign in the Men's Room in a food court in Thailand while visiting my daughter.



Let your mind run free...

So, that's it from my World. Happy Friday.

Thanks for what you do, and how you do it.

With pride...

Ed

Ed Racht, MD
edward.racht@gmr.net

