

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?

Once again, NYC EMS is at a crossroads. The question is simply one of the continuing survival of the agency as we know it---along with the thousands of jobs EMS provides to us.

The groups who want to carve up this agency are already well known to the membership---the commercial ambulances and the voluntary hospital ambulances. They are anxious to get the big slices of the EMS pie that former EMS Director Doyle publicly promised them.

In many areas of this city the voluntaries have already made off with the wealthiest neighborhoods---leaving NYC EMS to cover the ghettos. Worse, HHC just winks as these wealthy hospitals directly bill the "Blue Cross" paying customers and keep the proceeds for themselves. Meanwhile, NYC EMS is getting the leftovers in funding as the media rakes EMS over the coals for not running enough units to handle our million+ annual call volume.

This must be a good deal for the voluntaries because the commercial ambulances want the same arrangement. The commercials are pushing at the Regional Emergency Medical Service Council (REMSCO) to do EMS "911" work for the same third party reimbursement right EMS gives the voluntary units. The commercials are hungry---especially since the State and City have cut back on the commercial ambulance transfer reimbursements.

This proposal is by far the greatest threat to the EMT jobs in this agency. Even though we are grossly underpaid in NYC EMS, the commercial ambulances in this city pay roughly half of what EMS pays in salary and benefits. Local 2507 should be focusing its efforts on destroying this "privatization" threat by vigorously advancing the professional third emergency service model to the public.

CONTRACTING OUT:

Instead, this Local recently went on the public record in support of contracting out our jobs to additional voluntary hospital units---namely Bayley Seton Hospital on Staten Island. The voluntaries are catching on---now Astoria General wants approval to run their own units. Despite repeated pleas, the Local Executive Board has not rejected Executive Board Member Joan Hilgardner's speech in favor of Bayley Seton's application for a Certificate of Need to run EMS system units. The commercial ambulances have appealed the Bayley Seton certificate approval because they want the certificate for the commercials.

If the commercials win this fight, they will use this victory as their ticket to replace our jobs in the 911 system.

The commercials will rush to replace our city units with their commercial units---with our membership losing out on the jobs they now hold. The commercials will claim that they are able to "save" the city money while they gut EMS as we know it.

IS THERE LIFE AFTER FDNY?

In my opinion, none of our jobs would survive in FDNY. As is done in many other cities, FDNY would likely "contract out" the EMT jobs as outlined above. The medics would be replaced as soon as FDNY could manage to train firefighters as Paramedics.

I don't have a clue why President Gutwirth would think differently on this score. The draft proposal Gutwirth admits he handed over to an EMS Chief actually called for Firefighters to be trained in EMT work---with our EMT jobs disappearing. In sum, our jobs would probably be contracted out with a huge loss in pay and benefits.

EMS AS A THIRD EMERGENCY SERVICE:

The Local needs to counter this contracting out threat NOW. One way is of course to advance the third emergency service model forthwith. This EMS Local should be advancing the goals of NYC EMS---to promptly serve the emergency medical needs of all of this city's residents in a unified, non-discriminatory manner.

Another crucial element of this political action has to be what I have been advocating for ten years---the designation of EMS uniformed members as Peace Officers. (All New York City Fire Department uniformed personnel are Peace Officers empowered to act in fire-related emergencies.)

Based on our greater training and higher NYC EMS standards, this Local should seek the same status from the New York City Council and the State Legislature. This way we---the EMS professionals---would have the special legal status that the commercials and voluntaries could not match.

We are dangerously close to being outflanked---the members have to take charge of their Local now---and set it on the right course once again. There is no time to lose.

In solidarity,
Richard McAllan