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NYC FDNY & NYC EMS—MARRIAGE OR HOSTILE TAKEOVER???

This JEMS Conference has seen fit to highlight the so called merger of NYC EMS with the NYC Fire Department. Tonight the conference participants will no doubt hear the NYC Fire Department's side of the story—how great the merger has been for both Departments and for the citizens of New York City. Unfortunately, the reality is quite different—a backward NYC Fire Department is trying to squeeze NYC EMS back into the 1970's bottle with FDNY. As part of this process, FDNY has systematically destroyed the identity of the New York City Emergency Medical Service.

While one could easily argue that this merger has been a boon for the underutilized NYC Fire Department, an obvious question arises for the NYC EMS employees who were involuntarily transferred to the NYC Fire Department—what is going to happen to the EMS workforce?? FDNY and the City "schmoozed" the EMS workforce into believing that this alleged merger would be good for both EMS and Fire employees. The claim was that FDNY would treat EMS workers as proper members of the NYFD. Your writer has an entirely different view of the merger for the reasons expressed below. The opinions expressed in this flyer are the personal opinions of yours truly, Richard J. McAllan, EMT-P, who has served as a NYC EMS Senior Paramedic for over twenty years.

It is certainly well settled that the Fire organizations have counseled their fire members to attempt to take over the EMS systems in their respective cities. This NYC EMS/FDNY merger is but one more example of a medically inexperienced Fire Department taking over a sophisticated EMS system. Recently I had the privilege of attending three days of the annual National EMS Employees (NEEON) conference. This last year the conference was held in Pittsburgh, Pa., which has a first rate separate EMS system. [The Pittsburgh EMS System even performs heavy and water rescue for the citizens of that City.] This NEEON conference was attended by many urban independent EMS services with representatives present from San Francisco, British Columbia, Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Boston.

As part of this conference, the representatives from the various systems each gave a report on what is happening in their cities. Every EMS system complained of their Fire Departments trying to absorb their EMS Departments. The reasons were pretty much the same in each report: the Fire Departments' fire calls are way down and the Fire unions are looking to justify the large budgets they have in these cities. Many of these cities, including Pittsburgh, already have Fire Department First Responder programs in place.

Your writer does not oppose such FD "First Responder" programs if the first responder program is meant to supplement a strong third service EMS. However, that is not what is happening in many other cities. For example, in cities such as Chicago and Los Angeles, all civilian EMS jobs are in the process of being absorbed outright by their Fire Departments.

In New York City, the EMS takeover was accomplished by Mayor Guiliani pushing a budget gimmick through the New York City Council. This gimmick was an illegal transfer of approximately \$100,000,000 of EMS/HHC public health care funding to the FDNY on an annual basis. Simply put, under this illegal arrangement, the FDNY gets the EMS budget money every year whether or not EMS medical professionals continue to staff the NYC EMS ambulances in the future. Even though the NYC Health and Hospitals Corporation and NYC EMS were established by a 1969 Act of the New York State Legislature, Mayor Guiliani was careful to avoid the State Legislature in this illegal takeover bid.

The contractual merger of FDNY and NYC EMS is currently the subject of a lawsuit filed by your writer and another New York City Paramedic in New York State Supreme Court. This lawsuit, which seeks dissolution of the merger because it was not approved by the state legislature, is still pending decision. Another Guiliani plan to contract out the operation of a New York City public hospital to a private entity has been recently struck down by another State Supreme Court Justice.

Unfortunately, in New York City, NYC EMS has been taken over by a medically ignorant fire agency which is taking the more evolved NYC EMS back to at least the 1970's in many ways. FDNY's response time to fires is up by over 30 seconds in many boroughs. FDNY, which is many millions of dollars over budget in this takeover, is scaling EMS units back at each station to cover their FDNY budget overages. Worse, Deputy Fire Commissioner Dolan has just announced another \$5,000,000 worth of EMS cuts to pay for the ambulance stations which FDNY promised the City Council would be constructed from capital funds. FDNY has stopped concerning itself with prompt system response to lower priority EMS calls even though the chance of patients "going sour" in these call types is obvious.

With much fanfare, FDNY has instituted an Advanced Paramedic Response Unit (APRU) system for New York City which has actually placed the citizens of this City at greater risk. This APRU system has eliminated approximately thirty eight hour tours of Paramedic *transport* ambulance coverage. In its place, NYC EMS is operating APRU's in non-transport vehicles without replacing the transport capable ambulances FDNY permanently took off service. Incidents have already occurred where these APRU's have waited for extended periods for a transport capable ambulance. Worse, the dispatchers must assign a transport ambulance to back up these APRU's even when they are holding another "difficulty breather" call with no other EMS unit available. Consequently, EMS response and on scene time has been increasing under this ill advised FDNY program.

Over the last twenty years NYC EMS has developed an Type I ambulance specification which far exceeds the federal ambulance specifications. These stringent EMS specifications make the ambulances far more crashworthy and minimizes the risks of oxygen fueled fires which have occurred in NYC EMS ambulances following serious collisions. FDNY has secretly negotiated a new "off the shelf" Type III ambulance contract that quite literally wipes out the twenty years of hard fought safety improvements won by the Local. Imagine what would have happened if NYC EMS had taken over the underutilized Fire Department and wiped out FDNY's safety program!! In either event, since more EMS workers are certain to suffer greater injury in intersection accidents and thus collect more in Line of Duty and pension benefits, any claimed cost savings in this attempted ambulance switchover are a potentially deadly illusion. At the same time, FDNY has issued new turnout coats to EMS employees which would support combustion if they are ignited.

FDNY has already been trying to void many of the NYC EMS Local's hard fought gains over the years by incorrectly saying that those earlier negotiated agreements no longer apply in FDNY. For example, FDNY is trying to break an agreement with the Local which provided that any EMS employee could volunteer to work overtime before other EMS employees were mandated to work overtime. Now FDNY wants to restrict some EMS workers from volunteering to work overtime and force the large segment of single parents working for NYC EMS to routinely perform mandatory overtime when these parents have other child care responsibilities to take care of.

The above issues are but a small sampling of the reasons why the future of emergency medical care looks very bleak in New York City at the present time. NYC EMS desperately needs to be broken away from the NYC Fire Department and reestablished as a separate EMS agency. There is no time to be lost in this effort if New Yorkers are to continue to get first class pre-hospital emergency medical care.

Respectfully Submitted by Richard J. McAllan, EMT-P