

Rural Health Day Essay

Emergency medical services are an essential part of the healthcare system being tasked with, responding, assessing, and treating, potentially critical community members. Even though EMS workers are one of the most crucial health care workers, they continue to be one of the most underpaid essential workers with the added risk of being one of the most vulnerable to COVID-19. Throughout the past two years, EMS workers have had to deal with the possibility of unknowingly treating infected COVID-19 patients without suitable protective equipment in a vehicle with little to no ventilation. With the lack of pay and the lack of health security, the employment of EMS workers is dangerously low.

Due to the significant decrease in employment rates the quality of emergency response teams is in question. One EMS agency west of Marquette is expiring such EMT shortages in a 1500 mile radius which is typically covered by six paramedics, but now due to impending staff shortages this 1500 mile sector is made up of four paramedics resulting in dwindling response time. Michigan as a whole state currently has 28,804 EMS providers employed and over 1000 paramedics positions available. These staffing shortages have been a building crisis for years, but due to the pandemic workers are unwilling to work such a dangerous job for mediocre pay and benefits. With simple revisions to the EMS profession, this employment crisis may be solved before patients' well beings are put at risk.

While current EMS agencies are trying to hang onto remaining staff due to staff shortages are causing a major strain on them due to the lack of time off. The Michigan Association of Ambulance Services and the Michigan Association of Fire Chiefs have called on state leaders to

increase funding to increase EMS employee salaries. Hopefully, with the increased budgets EMS agencies will be able to allow current staff to take vacations and provide current and future staff with monetary rewards, such as a paycheck for an employee, or an incentive program with non-monetary rewards, including recognition for performance and promotion within the agency.

Along with incentives, the education for EMTs and paramedics could be altered. The Michigan Association of Ambulance Services said the prospective paramedics decreased in 2013 when the approval of training programs was changed to the necessary national accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs. That led many agencies who were operating their own training to stop training.

With the use of monetary rewards and incentive programs which allow non-monetary rewards within an organization and less complex training protocols as well as the adjustment in budgets for the EMS agencies to allow higher wages for EMTs and paramedics, the EMS staff shortages in Michigan may slowly be resolved before the number of these essential workers is dangerously low.