

Local EMS Shortage

When it's a matter of life or death, you need help immediately. Where do you turn in these emergencies? Local emergency medical service (EMS) personnel are the people who help best in medical crises. Currently, UP communities are facing desperate staffing shortages for these EMS agencies - at least ten have closed in recent years, forcing the remaining to cover many miles of ground with their limited staff. This is a dangerous situation - because of the distance these agencies have to cover and the limited workers they have, people who are in desperate need of medical help are forced to wait. To eliminate this shortage, we need to raise awareness, recruit workers, retain and support EMS personnel, and help these agencies succeed.

The first step to handling this shortage is to raise awareness. First, communities need to be made aware of this shortage. This shortage is already covered on news websites, but it should also be published in newspapers, broadcast on radio stations, and posted on social media. There may already be people within UP communities that have EMT experience that could volunteer their services on an on-call basis to help with staffing shortages. Communities should also help fund EMT services, because currently government funding is not sufficient. Community donations could help cover the costs of equipment and other essentials of EMS services.

The next step to solving this problem is to recruit new EMS personnel. Recruiting can be done online, through community programs, and in high schools. Typically, EMT training only takes about six months to complete, which is an incentive for students and others who aren't interested in spending the usual two to four years in college. One way to recruit people, specifically high school students, is to offer scholarships to students who go into EMT or paramedic programs - free education is an incentive for most students. Another idea to consider is to offer contracts between students and EMS agencies. These individuals would have their training paid for, and in return would work for EMS services for a set amount of time.

A crucial part to stopping this shortage is to retain EMS personnel. One of the main causes of EMS shortages nationwide is low wages. Currently, Michigan legislators are trying to pass a bill that would increase the budget given to EMS services. This would help relieve strain on EMS agencies to pay their employees. The ability to offer higher wages would help EMS agencies attract and retain EMTs and paramedics.

The long-term success of EMS agencies in the UP will stop this shortage. We need to work together to help solve this problem, because it can mean life or death. UP communities need to be made aware of this problem, workers need to be recruited, and wages and staffing need to improve for EMS personnel. Once these issues are resolved, the UP's emergency medical service agencies will be able to continue serving their communities.

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