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*A Hall Ambulance Periodical Dedicated to Your Wellness, Well-Being, and the HAS Employee Experience*

## Mental Health in Emergency Medical Services

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More than half a century has elapsed since the first International Congress of Mental Health was constructed in 1948. Since then, great progress has been made in the field of mental health education, resulting in a greater acceptance and understanding of mental illnesses and their potential consequences. Despite these advancements, the emergency medical services (EMS) community has remained among some of the highest rates of occurrence of mental illness paired with some of the lowest likelihood of seeking treatment.

An occupation within EMS results in a high-stress work environment including general job-related stressors, poor sleep schedules, and repeated exposure to hazards and tragedy – all contributing to the association between EMS personnel and the occurrence of mental illness. Foundationally, the EMS community is driven on the perception of maintaining a strong and unphased demeanor. The desire to possess a resilient appearance stem from the fear of being viewed as weak or incapable by colleagues and supervisors. Collectively, these factors

create an environment of increased risk for developing mental illnesses, yet a decreased tendency to seek assistance for deteriorating mental health.

In the United States, death by suicide is a leading cause of premature deaths of EMS personnel, second only to death by motorized vehicles during responses occurring on roadways. As alarming as this single statistic is, it is not a new finding; it has been relevant for decades. Yet, the EMS community has continued to maintain the same trajectory regarding this subject matter with little to no substantial improvements visible.

Nationwide, there is a significantly increased rate of depression, anxiety, fatigue, sleep disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicidality among EMS workers than the public. An anonymous survey conducted in 2017 evaluated the potential risk of future suicidal behavior among 903 prehospital providers within twenty different EMS agencies and communities. Results from the survey revealed that 31.3% of the

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## Stress Busters

We could all use a little less stress!! Try these techniques for quick relaxation and de-stressing!

- Walk barefoot in the grass or on bare ground for 10-15 minutes. (You can also sit with your feet in the grass or on the ground.)
- Try this "Relaxing Pose": Standing, bend and place your hands on your thighs. With your chin parallel to the floor, breathe in and arch your chest forward; breathe out and arch up like a cat. (You can also do this seated!)
- Go on YouTube and watch three short "Baby Animals" videos.
- Drink green tea – it is packed with theanine, which increases the brain's output of relaxation-inducing alpha waves and reduces the output of tension-making beta waves.
- Rub the palms of your hands together fast to create heat (like Mr. Miyagi) and then quickly place your hands over your closed eyes, relaxing for 60 seconds.
- Chew gum...it reduces stress, promotes mind clarity, and increases focus.
- Visualize a safe place where negativity and stress are not allowed – a real or imaginary place decorated and filled with all things you deem peaceful, lovely, and inviting.

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## Do Something Different

Work, eat, sleep, repeat. Are you stuck in this cycle? It's time to do something different!

- Integrate creativity! Writing, cooking, drawing, painting, woodworking, scrapbooking, gardening, sewing, knitting – being creative reduces stress!
- Add plants or animals to your home! Research shows that having living things (even fish!) reduces stress and blood pressure.
- Swear or punch something (not people)! Let off steam by saying a few swear words or punching something inanimate to reduce anxiety and stress.
- Pop bubble wrap! YES! Research has shown that crushing bubble wrap can provide as much stress relief as a 30-minute massage!



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- Seek silence. Turn everything off – cell phones, computer, TV, anything that makes noise. Sit or lay down, breathe, and just BE.

## Mental Health in EMS

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respondents scored as having a validated increased risk for future suicidal behaviour. Of the 903 EMS providers included in the survey, 27.2% reported experiencing at least one suicidal ideation in the past year – a rate that is seven times higher than the average population.

Universally, the top three stressors contributing to a poor state of mental health include career, finances, and lack of sleep. Depending on shift length plus call volume and occurrence, there is an inevitable alteration to EMS providers' circadian rhythm. This prevents the establishment of a healthy, regular sleep cycle for these individuals. In addition, many providers seek overtime hours outside of their normally scheduled shifts due to many feeling the additional hours worked are a necessity for a comfortable financial standing. While both sleep disturbances and financial concern are products of a career within EMS, the largest stressor contributing to an increased risk of mental illness is pinned to the nature of the occupation itself.

EMS workers are regularly exposed to the realities of human sufferings and tragedy, including death. There is an inherent nature of unpredictability within the occupation emphasizing the need for providers to possess the ability to focus their attention and continue to perform in situations of high psychological pressure. Providers often succumb to feelings of guilt and even shame when they are unable to successfully treat a patient's condition

Individuals within EMS typically have strong personalities and are self-motivated in pursuit of successful outcomes. An internal image of ego and pride is, in large, the common denominator as to why EMS workers fail to disclose personal difficulties with their mental health. A survey was conducted by the University of Phoenix regarding the reasons why EMS providers fail to report their own mental health decline. The results indicated that approximately 55% felt their superiors would treat them differently, 45% felt their coworkers would see them as weak, and 34% felt their promotion potential would be hindered if they were transparent about their mental health struggle.

To change the trend of providers failing to seek care for mental illness, there first must be a shift in how the EMS community perceives and engages with mental health issues regarding themselves and coworkers. An initiation for change can be implemented through the steps of ensuring EMS personnel are properly educated on mental health issues specific to EMS, promoting a stigma-free environment that is welcoming of mental health wellness and struggles, enacting protocols for critical incident stress management and decompression, and creating proactive pathways to obtaining help on-and off-site.

(Adapted from: <https://www.jems.com/exclusives/a-frontline-battle-the-mental-health-crisis-in-emergency-medical-services/>)

## OCTOBER AWARENESS

Domestic Violence Awareness Month (PURPLE)  
Mental Illness Awareness Month (GRAY)  
National Crime Prevention Month  
6-12: Mental Illness Awareness Week (GRAY)  
6-12: Fire Prevention Week  
10: World Mental Health Day (GRAY)  
28: National First Responder Appreciation Day

## OCTOBER COMMUNITY EVENTS

11: Mike McCann Golf Classic @ Valley Oaks Golf Course  
11: Artfest 2024 @ 15329 South 'H' Street  
11-13: Greek Food Festival @ 401 Truxtun Avenue  
12: Running with the Angels 5K @ Yokuts Park  
12-13: Disney on Ice @ Mechanics Bank Arena  
13: Lake Evans Triathlon @ Lake Evans  
14: Cults and Classics – "The Lost Boys" @ Fox Theatre  
19: Coptic Orthodox Festival @ 9200 White Lane  
25: Links for Life Hot Pink Celebration @ Luigi's  
26: Kaiser Permanente Drug Takeback/Recycling @ 8800 Ming Avenue  
26: Candlelight – A Haunted Evening of Halloween Classics @ Doré Theatre  
27: Bakersfield Monster Mash Dash @ The Park at Riverwalk  
28: Cults and Classics – "Halloween" @ Fox Theatre

## OCTOBER FARMER'S MARKETS

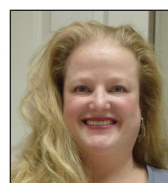
5, 12, 19, 26 (Sat): From the Farmhouse Farmer's Market @ 3201 'F' St.; Downtown Hen's Roost Farmer's Market @ 1916 'G' St.; Riverlakes Farmer's Market @ 3825 Riverlakes Drive

## The HR Spot

Open Enrollment is here!

Log into [www.employeenavigator.com](http://www.employeenavigator.com) to choose your benefits for 2025.

Everyone must login and make their selections for the coming plan year.



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WellNow is published monthly for Hall Ambulance employees and their families.