



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Aaron Miranda

*Captain/Paramedic
Poway Fire Department*

At age 19, Aaron Miranda wasn't interested in spending weekends hanging out with friends or going to parties. Instead, every Friday evening, the rookie EMT headed from his home in San Diego to Rosarito, Mexico, to volunteer for a rescue squad. There, he'd spend the next 72 hours treating sick and injured locals and tourists.

"About 80% of our patients were trauma victims, mostly car wrecks but also near-drownings and falls off the cliffs near the beach," Miranda said. "I don't ever remember using a map. We'd be told, 'Go down the main street and turn right at the tree stump and left at the bolder and ask Juanita if they know where so-and-so lives.' We'd turn our sirens on and hopefully someone would come out waving their arms."

Twenty-five years later, Miranda still splits his time between the U.S. and Mexico. He's a captain-paramedic for the Poway Fire Department near San Diego. He's also an NAEMT instructor who teaches throughout Latin America; a trainer with the Rhino Rescue Team, which teaches specialized rescue techniques throughout Mexico; and chief flight paramedic for Airlink Air Ambulance, which transports critically ill patients from Latin America to hospitals in the United States.

Miranda spoke with NAEMT News about his experiences working in the U.S. and Latin America, why he became a certified flight paramedic last year and why the international exchange of EMS knowledge and education is so important.



What sparked your interest in EMS?

I knew I wanted to do something with medicine since I was a kid. I worked as a mechanic's assistant for the Border Patrol as part of a work-study program when I was in high school. One day, I found a first-aid kit in one of the vehicles and I was just fascinated. I thought, 'This is what I want to do.'

I became an EMT in 1994, right after I graduated. My friends thought I was down in Rosarito partying, but I was volunteering. I loved it. I guess I was a little bit weird in that regard.

How did you become so comfortable working in both countries?

I was born in Los Angeles but I lived in Tijuana until I was 12. I wanted to go to junior high and high school in the U.S., so I went to live with my aunt in Long Beach, California. Spanish was my first language, and I have family in both places, so both places feel like home.

Tell us about one place in your city that you get called to again and again?

We get a lot of calls from Potato Chip Rock trail. It's an 8-mile round trip hike to a very thin rock formation that looks like a potato chip on its side. Not many people knew about it until a few years ago, when a hiking magazine called it one of the best hikes in the world. It became an overnight international tourist destination. We started getting crowds of people from all over the world walking up there and waiting over an hour to take a picture on top of it. Visitors become overexerted or they don't bring enough water, so we get called to the trail a lot.

What kind of situations do you respond to as a flight paramedic?

We respond to lots of tourists with medical conditions or injuries who need to be brought back to the United States. There are also a lot of alternative cancer clinics in Mexico. People with terminal cancer fly down to Mexico for treatment, and when it doesn't work, they call us to take them home.

We also work with Shriners Hospitals for Children to fly burn victims to the United States for treatment. They are very, very sick kids who have been burned in house fires and other accidents. We've flown as far as Brazil. We'll stabilize patients where they are, and then take them to the Shriners hospital in Sacramento or Galveston. Shriners Hospital provides this as a free service to children, anywhere in the world where Shriners operates. If the child doesn't have a U.S. visa, Shriners will arrange a temporary visa for the child and one family member, usually the mom.

You've worked as a flight paramedic for over a decade. Why did you decide to get your Certified Flight Paramedic credential last year?

As a captain for the Poway Fire Department, I spend most of my time on the engine. I get my patient care fix working as a flight paramedic. I wanted to challenge myself to see if I had what it took to meet the standards for a flight paramedic in the U.S., which involves an advanced level of training and care.

Patients undergo physiological changes when they're put into a Learjet and flown 500 mph for long distances. They may not adjust to pressurization or depressurization of the cabin as well as a person in good health. Sometimes we're told that they are stable before we head down there, but when we get to the hospital we find out their condition has worsened. Patients can also deteriorate in flight.



Potato Chip Rock, Poway, California.

We have a flight nurse and sometimes a doctor on our flights. But I wanted to make sure that I knew as much as I could about operating a ventilator and troubleshooting the specialized equipment we use in flight. I believe in teamwork. If something comes up, I need that knowledge so I can be a contributor to solving the problem. We can work together to do our best for that very ill patient.

Why is it important to be an NAEMT member?

NAEMT looks out for our well-being, and is involved in advocating for EMS finances and provider health and longevity. NAEMT also has a mission of providing up-to-date, quality prehospital care education. The teams of authors and editors NAEMT uses for its courses are top-notch, and that's very important to me. One of my driving engines is to offer the most recent knowledge to my students, and NAEMT courses allow me to do that.

What keeps you motivated?

There's a need for high quality, current and relevant EMS training in other countries, and I try to do my part to fulfill that need. One of the things I really enjoy about going to Mexico and the other Latin American countries is most of the students are there because they want to be there. They are motivated and excited to learn. In the U.S., if a course is a requirement to work or for their department, sometimes students are not as engaged or excited to be in the class. They see it as just a step to get to something else. When I get EMTs and paramedics who are eager to learn, it's very rewarding.