



NAEMT Position Statement Just Culture in EMS

Statement:

NAEMT supports and encourages the establishment of a “Just Culture” environment within all EMS agencies. The term “Just Culture” refers to a values-supportive system of shared accountability where health care organizations are accountable for the systems they have designed and for responding to the behaviors of their staff in a fair and just manner. Staff, in turn, are accountable for the quality of their choices and for reporting both their errors and system vulnerabilities.

Background:

EMS practitioners are confronted on a daily basis with a diverse, difficult, and ambiguous work environment, which demands dedication, regular training and a focus on providing accurate and critical lifesaving emergency medical services. Practitioners, along with the EMS agencies that employ them, must recognize the potential for medical errors during the provision of emergency medical services, and appreciate the subsequent learning opportunities that are created when these errors are appropriately analyzed and managed.

A Just Culture environment provides benefits for patients, EMS practitioners, EMS agencies, and the public at large:

Patients: When practitioner mistakes are recognized and not hidden through fear of punishment, a Just Culture environment allows individuals and organizations to learn from mistakes, thus promoting improved services and higher standards of patient care. This in turn leads to a safer system for both patient and practitioner.

Practitioners: Through the establishment of a just system which provides shared accountability that is neither punitive nor blame free, individual practitioners, EMS agencies, healthcare systems, and regulators learn how to improve the quality of care and minimize the impact of human error and undesirable behavioral choices.

EMS Agencies: By creating an environment of internal transparency around risk, system components and behavioral choices leading to increased risk are identified and managed more effectively. As adverse events occur, the agency has an objective framework for a fair and constructive response to human errors, behavioral choices, and events.

Public at Large: It is also reasonable to expect that systemic initiatives aimed at improving responder and patient safety, particularly those regarding EMS vehicle operations and operations on the public highways, will also result in improvements to the safety of the public at large.

References:

Whack a Mole - Marx, David (2009). Whack-a-Mole: The Price We Pay For Expecting Perfection. Plano, Texas: By Your Side Studios.

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To Err is Human: Building a Safer Health System (2000), Institute of Medicine (IOM)

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