



EMS News in Focus

with [Arthur Hsieh](#)

8 things we wish the general public knew about EMS

After watching yet another television show that attempts to glamorize public safety providers, I thought about what really goes on inside our world

Feb 11, 2019

After watching part of — a little bit — OK, about five minutes of yet another television show that attempts to glamorize public safety providers, I thought about what really goes on inside our world. Here are the top eight things we wish the general public knew about providing care in the field. Feel free to add your comments below!

1. WE DO MORE THAN DRIVE AMBULANCES AT BREAKNECK SPEEDS

In fact, we [try not to drive fast at all](#), since we don't want to hurt ourselves — or you, when you pull out in front of us, turn in front of us or hit us from the side when we are responding to a call. Even more important, we'll take our time to get to the hospital so we can provide you a comfortable ride that doesn't scare you half to death.

2. WE TRAIN HARD

In the very rare circumstances when your life is hanging in the balance, you will want us to do everything right to give you the greatest chance of surviving the catastrophic event. We live for that moment.

3. THE VAST PART OF OUR DAY IS SPENT MANAGING SOCIAL, FINANCIAL AND EMOTIONAL ISSUES

Most of our patients are not experiencing medical emergencies, even when it feels like it to them. That's OK — we know that just having a fellow human kneeling by your side and saying "We are here to help you" can go a long way in assisting your recovery from your crisis.

4. WE'RE NOT ALL FIREFIGHTERS

And [we're not all paid](#). And if we are paid, it's often not well. Most of us cannot afford to have a family or own a home on our base salary. We compensate by working long hours — 60 to 80 hours a week. That gets old.

5. WE GET HURT – A LOT

[Lifting human bodies is difficult](#); in fact, it's easier to move refrigerators than patients. Please don't be surprised if we ask you to move from your chair to our cot. We've made a clinical evaluation and determined that it's safe for you to do so. It's not that we're lazy; it's just that many of us want to continue to work in our profession for a long time.

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6. VIRTUALLY EVERYTHING YOU SEE ON TELEVISION AND MOVIES DOES NOT DEPICT WHAT WE DO

If it did, it would be fairly boring. We spend a lot of time staged in parking lots and on street corners, waiting to be dispatched to the next call. Sometimes, while sitting at the station, we spend a lot of time staring at the TV ourselves.

7. ON OCCASION, OUR BOREDOM IS PUNCTUATED BY SOME HAIR-RAISING EVENT

We're human, so we, too, will be nervous and even a bit frightened in really dangerous situations. We just won't show it because we need you to trust that we know what we're doing. So while everyone else is running around, EMS providers walk a little slower, act a little more deliberately. That gives us the chance to see the big picture and try to keep everyone safe.

8. TO REITERATE: WE'RE HUMAN

We make mistakes. We work hard. We don't do this line of work for the glory or for the money (there's precious little of both). We do it to help members of our community when they need it the most, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year. You expect it, and you deserve it. We know it's a big obligation, but we will be there when you call.

This article, originally published on Oct. 29, 2012, has been updated

About the author

Art Hsieh, MA, NRP teaches in Northern California at the Public Safety Training Center, Santa Rosa Junior College in the Emergency Care Program. An EMS provider since 1982, Art has served as a line medic, supervisor and chief officer in the private, third service and fire-based EMS. He has directed both primary and EMS continuing education programs. Art is a textbook writer, author of "EMT Exam for Dummies," has presented at conferences nationwide and continues to provide direct patient care regularly. Art is a member of the EMS1 Editorial Advisory Board. Contact Art at Art.Hsieh@ems1.com and connect with him on Facebook or Twitter.

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Posted by **Wone** Jul 26, 2019

You left out the low wages, long hour's, time away from our family, constant hate from the public cause we don't do more, high stress levels and damage on our health.....



Posted by **fcantone** Feb 27, 2019

I still love my job, even after 27 years.
A bunch has changed, I do yearn for the old Johnny and Roy days though.
It seemed better then, but I still love my career choice. 😊



Posted by **History Nut** Feb 24, 2019

Your article certainly stands the test of time Art. Several of the new shows relating to emergency services were so bad that I couldn't stand even 5 minutes of them.
"Emergency" will always be the standard they should look to while "Third Watch", especially the first season did very well. As far as what the public should know about our work, I think a recent thing of FB kind of said it well. It was an ad for a T-shirt. Not the exact wording but something like: " EMS, once you are in, there is no going back; it is like the Mafia: you know too much!"





Posted by **mtgrill1** Feb 24, 2019

Don't you think the public would want to know about our high rates of suicidal ideation/suicide?

♥ 2








Posted by **bobavsec** Feb 21, 2019

Excellent piece of prose, Art! Short and sweet and hits the high points! Trust me, I feel the same why when I watch any of the fire service shows that come along. IMHO nobody has come as close as "Emergency" back in the 70's and probably never will. Which is a shame because look how many of us grew up saying we wanted to be like "Johnny and Roy!"

♥ 2

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