

Overpaid?

An Editorial by Joe Moore

There are some people that seem to think that the EMS providers on Beaver Island are overpaid. Can you believe that? Here are some statistics that you might find interesting.

In the last fifteen years, the EMS providers on Beaver Island have not received one raise. In the meantime, the cost of living has increased every year. The cost of living based upon federal reports has increased forty percent over the last fifteen years, and that's without any compounding of the rates. The hourly rate for an EMS provider has increased zero percent

In the last year, only because statistics for a longer time are not available, the emergency response time, from the alert from Central Dispatch until the first responder begins the response, has been less than three minutes. The reason for this fast response time is simple. The on-call EMS providers don't go out to the bar, they don't go around the island, and they don't have the opportunity to use the recreation that Beaver Island offers. When on-call they **can't** go fishing, go cut wood, go mushroom hunting, go for a boat ride, go visit someone on the south end, go swimming, go boodling, and they certainly can't do many of the things that the visitors and residents of Beaver Island come to the island to do.

Yes, BIEMS providers do receive professional compensation when they are providing the care to an emergency patient, but this compensation would barely pay for one family dinner for four at a local restaurant. Most of you reading this would not put you and your family through the life style of EMS providers for just this one dinner.

In the last fifteen years, the education of EMS providers has exceeded eight thousand hours and has included three 1200+ hour paramedic programs, ten EMT programs, five first responder program, many advanced cardiac life support programs, many pediatric advanced life support programs, at least thirty cardiopulmonary resuscitation education programs, ten advanced stroke life support programs, eight Pediatric Education for PreHospital Provider programs, eight International Trauma Life Support programs, and many continuing education programs from patient assessment to emergency driving to drug administration in the non-advanced setting and every other topic in emergency medical care. Participants received no pay for attending these educational sessions. All were attended on a volunteer basis.

In the last year, the average time spent on an EMS run was greater than three and a half hours, making the hours in-service greater than 275 hours average per year, and this does not include the community education programs, nor the many other activities for the benefit of the community. This time adds up to at least four thousand hours.

Now, overpaid has to have an agreed upon definition. I'd like to use this one; "money paid in excess of what is due." What is excess of what is due? Do any of you reading this consider \$4.33 an hour 'in excess of what is due'? Do you consider \$4.33 in excess of what is due for giving up your social activities mentioned above? Do you consider \$4.33 an hour in excess of what is due for being available to

respond within three minutes to an emergency page? If you or your loved one is having an emergency, is paying someone \$4.33 per hour in excess of what is due for the readiness of your responders?

The BIEMS responders are licensed by the State of Michigan to provide emergency care before the patient arrives at the hospital. Would the heart attack victim, the stroke victim, the pregnant woman in labor victim, the motorcycle accident victim, the emergency patient on an outer island victim, the diabetic emergency victim, the head injury victim, the roll-over accident victim, or any other person having a medical emergency consider the pay of \$4.33 per hour to be in 'excess of what is due'?

How long have these EMS providers been overpaid, and why are they paid at all? I think the answer to this question is very simple, and I think these questions have already been answered, but there is more information that you should know. Fifteen years ago, there were three EMS providers who had paying jobs that allowed them to leave the job for an emergency. These providers were licensed paramedics that were volunteers. They wanted to be able to help people, their friends and neighbors, when the emergency arose, so they went to school for eighteen months and became paramedics. These three took the time to look at how they could cover the three positions of first responder, emergency medical technician, and paramedic for staffing an advanced life support ambulance. The real issue was in the summer when everyone was very busy providing services to the visitors and summer residents of the island. How could they get someone working in the service industry to leave their job to help during an emergency? Employers were probed and prodded, but there was no leeway given. Every service employee had to be at their service job and would not be allowed to leave even for an emergency. The fire department people got to leave for an emergency, why not the EMS people? The fire department people have less than five calls a year. Leaving a job five times a year is not too bad in the employers mind, but leaving the job once every three or four days was not acceptable to the employers, nor was being late if involved in an overnight or early morning emergency.

So, these three EMS providers sat down and tried to figure out a way to get island residents, whose entire yearly income was based upon working in the service industry, to be willing to give up some of this income. That wasn't going to happen. Even the dedicated EMS providers were not able to be in a position to give up this income. They had to eat and feed their family and pay the rent, etc. So these three put together what a service person could make during the busy season for just one shift with a little overtime, and they came up with eighty dollars for the shift at ten dollars an hour, and twenty dollars for giving up their recreation for one day. This was to become the "summer on-call wages" for the paramedic and for the EMT with the first responder making a third person at a much reduced pay. This pay for the providers was based upon an entry level service industry employee, such as a construction worker, a waitress, a cook, or something like this. It was, from the very beginning, meant to just pay the person to be available for about one day or maybe two days per week. And, it was very successful fifteen years ago.

However, this success was short-lived as these same very dedicated people became aware that they could do the same job, albeit somewhat busier, if they went to Boyne City, Allied EMS, Marshall Fire Department, or some other location and make more money doing the same thing for fewer hours of responsibility. After their shift, they could do all the things that they were denied doing on Beaver

Island, and still they could make more money. Here is just an example. If you work a twelve hour shift in Boyne City as a paramedic, you could make twice as much for half the time, and you could sleep right at their station if you were there overnight. This is nothing new. The nurses who worked for Munson Hospital had been doing this off-Island kind of thing for years and years. They would go down to work for three days, and come back to Beaver Island and spend three days vacation. The paramedics tried this, and then eventually decided to just move where the job was and use the three days to travel anywhere and do anything that they wanted to do; go fishing, go bowling; go shopping; visit relatives, etc. The \$4.33 per hour became a joke to them. If you could make twice as much for half the time, and have the travel issues of Beaver Island out of the way, why would you stay on Beaver Island?

Guess what? This same thing has happened to five of the six paramedics educated and trained right here on Beaver Island, and it also applies to the EMTs too. Even one of the medical first responder trained nursing assistants, right here on Beaver Island, makes more money per hour than the paramedics. So does the EMT who has moved on to working at the medical center. BIEMS lost some excellent EMS providers because they could not make a living being paid \$4.33 per hour. This wasn't exactly an excellent payment plan even if one person was paid this amount for a whole year for 365 days. The pay for a paramedic, living on Beaver Island, was \$36,500 per year for 365 days per year, 24 hours per day. No recreation, no time off, no family time, no personal time. That's the reason for the posts on the forum by one adult.

I would be happy to give a radio and a pager to anyone to give this a try. Just give up your entire life, and respond to every call for fire and EMS. No trips to the bar for a drink though. No fishing, no recreation, etc. Just be available for every page that happens every time it happens. Ask some of those that did it 365/24. Ask some of their family members how this experience was. You try it. Every single member of the Beaver Island Emergency Services Authority should try it. Then go through all the training to have someone's life in your hands, and continue to take the continuing education required to maintain your license and all your certifications required by the State of Michigan and your local medical control authority. I want you to have to make the decisions that I have had to make. Do I put a tourniquet on this patient's leg knowing full well that he will lose the leg due to the extended time for transport during a bad storm with no flights available, or do I gamble that he won't bleed to death if I don't put the tourniquet on? Do I fly in a Coast Guard helicopter with just the basic supplies to get a patient with a severe head injury to the hospital and get stranded on the mainland with no money and \$15,000 worth of equipment?

Give me a break. Overpaid? That's bull feces! \$4.33 per hour is in excess of what's due? That's bull feces! You are paying this money for insurance against your life. Just go out and ask the person who was so ill that each breath was a gasp. Go out and ask the person who had shingles inside his lungs. Go out and ask the person that had thirteen years, two months, and two days more with his family when he survived cardiac arrest. Go out and ask the patients' families that were fortunate enough to be able to visit their living family member before they died. Go out and ask the man who is walking around on the island after his severe head injury. Go out and ask the many stroke patients who got to the hospital in time to have very few deficits. Go out and ask the man with the severe leg injury who is walking around on that leg. Go out and ask the diabetics who were seizing due to their low blood sugar. Go out and ask

the man who got hit in the head by a tree whether an EMS person is overpaid. Go out and ask the patient that was close to death with a very fast heart rate, and who was fixed right here on the island. Go out and ask anyone who has had this emergency medical service respond to their homes.

All these EMS providers have left the island for this very reason. Not only is the pay ridiculously low. Not only is the life style unacceptable. Not only is the education demanding, physically, emotionally, and socially. But also, you have to listen to people talk about how you are overpaid. But also, you have to listen to how you are really not needed. But also, you have to put up with the political bull feces that simply ignorant people who not only say it, but put in print. And I do this? WHY? Why would I give up so much for so little? Try doing it for three years without a break that you didn't arrange by yourself. Try doing it with equipment that you have to beg to replace because it doesn't work. Try doing it in this atmosphere of ignorance. Overpaid? You are simply ignorant of the responsibility, the losses that I have put up with, the social occasions that I could not attend, the birthdays of my grandkids that I have missed, and then you want to demean me? You want to try to place the providers of the medical center against me? You want me to ignore all of this, and just continue to do it for \$4.33 per hour? When was the last time that you spent from 10 p.m. until 3:30 a.m. helping a neighbor and friend in a life and death emergency?

How much does this EMS provider pay cost the taxpayer? The answer is not very much. Last year over \$97,000 was collected for the provision of emergency assessment, emergency treatment, and emergency transport of emergency patients. \$36,000 of this of this \$97,000 was paid out to another provider for air services provided, which makes the income for BIEMS \$61,000 without tax revenues. The pay for the actual on-call paramedic, EMT, and MFRs for the provision of these services, payroll only for the actual on-call and wages for those on-call and the actual cost of the emergency runs in wages only, is less than \$61,000. These figures come from the actual expenses paid during the 2014-2015 budget year. The EMS providers provide more than enough income to cover the on-call wages.

So, it is pretty obvious that the taxpayer is really not paying for the wages of the EMS providers on Beaver Island. These providers are actually earning these wages. So where does this tax money go? The answer can be found in the budget. These taxes have to pay to have equipment on the ambulance that is required by the State of Michigan. These taxes have to pay to have office space to do the administrative tasks, and the administrator has to be paid also. The taxes have to pay for the loan payments for the East Side Fire Station. These taxes have to pay for the educational programs provided to the EMS providers. These taxes have to pay for the fuel used in the vehicles that are currently owned by the townships. These taxes have to pay for the maintenance of vehicles and the maintenance of equipment. These taxes pay for everything necessary to keep an emergency medical service in business, but they do not pay wages.

Try talking to someone that actually knows what they are talking about. Try asking the only few people left that have been doing EMS for more than ten years right here on Beaver Island. Or listen to the offered advice from someone from East Jordan who came to two of the ESA meetings and offered to help.

If it was such an overpaid position, then why did an advertisement in the Petoskey News Review and in the Charlevoix Courier get exactly zero responses? (I paid for this advertisement.) Why did a visit to all the agencies in Charlevoix County find not one interested party? (I made these visits.) Why did a request at an EMS instructor conference to four hundred people not get a single response? (I made this request.)

If it is such and overpaid position, why did Allied EMS back out of an offer to provide emergency medical services for the island? Because Allied knew they couldn't get anyone to come to Beaver Island for such low pay, and Beaver Island couldn't afford the wages of bringing a paramedic to and from the island and housing and travel.

Now tell me why the \$150 per day, an increase based upon the cost of living increases over the last fifteen years, is not justified. Tell me how \$150 per day is overpaid when a Boyne City paramedic working a 24 hour shift makes \$400. In two and half days, he'd get a full time paycheck if working in Boyne City. Tell me how \$150 per day is too much money to pay a resident paramedic when most of the on-call and pay per call wages are paid by the collections for the emergencies that occur.

The only explanation that I can find is lack of knowledge and lack of desire to gain that knowledge.

Take a look at the budget, and instead of tearing down your EMS providers by stating they are overpaid, maybe take some of that tax money and use it to **thank these people who give so much of their lives to the service of this Beaver Island community.**