

Nurse spearheads efforts to train EMTs

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
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Crowdfunding campaign online now

In a medical emergency, even seconds may count. Peter Hunt-Rosado thinks about that a lot because he works as an emergency nurse at Gallup Indian Medical Center, where patients may have to travel long distances for care. He worries that it's unnecessarily costing lives.

"You hear the stories or get a report from EMS that [a patient] has been down for an unknown amount of time since the first call was received, two hours prior to the arrival in the ER, or even six hours," he said. "We've had patients that have been having heart attacks that have gotten into a car and driven themselves an hour just to get to us for emergency treatment. In heavily populated areas this is unheard of."

When he first got to Gallup from Pembroke, N.C. in 2017, the frequency of such encounters shocked him. Now in the second year of his second stint here, he stepped up to be the face of a GoFundMe campaign that aims at creating a steady stream of EMTs to serve the sparsely populated reaches outside the city.

"You have four advanced [emergency] practitioners serving this huge area," Hunt-Rosado said. "You have a lot of intermediate medics and a lot of basic medics serving in this area, but not a lot of advanced practitioners. That's the gap we're trying to fill."

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A job market analysis commissioned by the Gallup Housing Authority and published last September indicated there were 14 open EMT positions in McKinley County advertised at that time, and 48 open positions that preferred candidates certified by the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians.

So far the campaign has only raised \$650 since its soft launch Jan. 23, but Hunt-Rosado has high hopes that it will grow when word spreads. If it works, it will become the basis for a fund that will pay students' school expenses while they study.

The long range goal is to save lives by making sure the most essential emergency care is available quickly. Hunt-Rosado said that starts with the ABCs: Airway, Breathing and Circulation. He explained EMTs look at the ABCs and decide what they should do first by thinking about what will preserve life.

The GoFundMe goal is to raise \$50,000 to help medical support staff – nurses and nurse's aides – to move up to the much-needed and higher-paying emergency responder jobs.

Because the EMT program is a non-degree track for most students, it's not eligible for the state's free tuition programs, Dr. Safia Rubaii explained. "The scholarships are only paying tuition, fees, books and program testing fees. Students are responsible for about \$350 to \$380 for uniforms, equipment and state and national exam/ licensing fees," she said.

The first group of 10 students, all support staff at GIMC, has already started at UNM-Gallup. They are enrolled in a class that trains them to be EMTs in a single semester, which makes them more valuable in the jobs they have but also prepares them to move into EMT work or pursue the advanced courses they need to become paramedics.

"Since they are already in the healthcare field, our hope is that they are exposed to some of the things they are going to come in contact with like vital signs [and] patient condition. We pull from that pool first," Hunt-Rosado said. "Ideally what we would like to do is not only bring in more basic EMTs, but it's also a pathway for some of these support staff to elevate their careers and reach higher for those higher-paying jobs."

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The group studying now got financial help from doctors who support the idea, including Rubaii, Hunt-Rosado said. The only thing the students have to pay for is their testing and certifications after they graduate. That enables the students to keep working their day jobs while they are taking the class.

“Think of this class as a proof of concept. If we can show that this works, then hopefully we can get community buy-in,” Hunt-Rosado said.

The outcome could literally mean life or death.

“We can continue miracles in the ER. We do some amazing stuff in the emergency room. But in a lot of cases the miracle has to start in the field,” Hunt-Rosado said.

For more information or to donate to the GoFundMe account, see https://www.gofundme.com/f/elevating-the-quality-of-care-for-our-community?utm_campaign=p_lco+share-sheet&utm_medium=copy_link&utm_source=customer

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