

Transporting Lazarus: Physicians, the State, and the Creation of the Modern Paramedic and Ambulance, 1955–73

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ABSTRACT. In 1966, morticians provided 50 percent of ambulance services in the United States; today advanced care by trained medical professionals en route to the hospital is considered a basic standard of care. The creation of emergency medical services (EMS) provides an important case study for how physicians acting as “experts” helped to shape the creation of federal policy in the post-World War II years. This paper challenges a narrative of the development of EMS that has emphasized technology, individual agency, and the role of fortuitous chance as the prime movers of EMS development. Instead it argues that a key factor in EMS development was the National Academy of Science–National Research Council’s Committee on Emergency Medical Services. Using the examples of paramedic training and ambulance design, this paper argues that members of the committee utilized complex mix of local experimentation and professional networking to suggest directions for the federal government’s efforts to create national standards and guidelines for EMS. The NAS–NRC Committee retained a prominent role in EMS development until the passage of the Emergency Medical Services Systems Act of 1973, when federal interest in EMS largely shifted from prehospital transport to an emphasis on in hospital care and regional trauma systems planning. **KEYWORDS:** emergency medical services, paramedic, ambulance design, National Academy of Sciences, Highway Safety.

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