

## **Before we were TEMS...the really early days<sup>1</sup>**

In the years before the Tidewater EMS Council was incorporated, regional EMS planning was supported by the Tidewater Regional Health Planning Council. Dr. Robert J. Robertson, Jr., MD, a Virginia Beach internist, served as chair of an EMS steering committee and eventually became the first president of the newly incorporated organization in 1974. In addition to Dr. Robertson, the early active members of the steering committee were Norfolk cardiovascular surgeon Dr. Robert D. Brickman (who became the incorporated organization's second president), Franklin Fire Chief James M. Wagenbach, Norfolk assistant civil defense director Robert L. Smith and assistant Norfolk General Hospital Administrator Edward M. Holmes, III. The first EMS project coordinator was Harry Bleh. Together, these six individuals could be considered the "fathers" of EMS in Tidewater<sup>2</sup>. Key regional milestones during those years were:

1972

- Discussed and organized a structure that would eventually become the Tidewater EMS Council (efforts continued through incorporation in 1974)
- Virginia Bureau of EMS offered strong positive feelings towards and agreed to provide all available data and resources to enhance the Tidewater EMS project
- The Virginia Beach Coronary Care program is launched following 2 years of planning by beach physicians and rescue squad leaders, and with medical society and state support and funding from the Virginia Regional Medical Program and local contributors
- Learned congress is considering two EMS bills to support regional EMS planning and development
- Investigated the Military and Coast Guard medical helicopter usage for EMS
- Received grant funding from the Virginia Regional Medical Program (VRMP) for a three year EMS project
- Employed an EMS project coordinator, Harry Bleh.

1973

- Distributed the first issue of the Tidewater EMS Bulletin. This issue was used to circulate new federal DOT EMS standards
- Held meetings with rescue squad, hospital and governmental officials to stress the need for a coordinated communications system, a central EMS resources and an inventory of EMS and related resources
- The first rescue squad cardiac technicians graduate in Virginia Beach
- Began design of the HEAR communications system
- Learned that VRMP funding would terminate in late 1973 (eventually extended into 1974). Applied for a Robert Wood Johnson grant to fund communications
- Congress and the president sign a federal EMS system funding bill

- Reviewed and submitted comments on a report titled Development of a Comprehensive Emergency Care System for the Commonwealth of Virginia. Comments included the need for regional EMS representation on the state advisory committee
- Met with R Adams Cowley and other Maryland EMS officials to discuss collaboration

1974

- The RW Johnson grant application, in competition with 252 nationwide applicants, is not successful
- Children’s Hospital is developing plans for an “Infant Transport System” and offered assistance
- Established the first regional EMS system goals and regional EMS work plan
- Reviewed Highway Safety Act grant requests for several ambulances and training equipment
- The EMS project is officially established as a division of the Tidewater Regional Health Planning Council and is called the Tidewater EMS Council.
- Closely followed development of guidance for the federal EMS Systems Act of 1973. In April the steering committee agrees to pursue a federal EMSS grant for the Establishment and Initial Operation of an EMS system. A system in Jacksonville, FL is shown as a nationwide model.
- Nansemond-Suffolk Rescue Squad requests assistance in developing an emergency coronary care program
- Employed an EMS training supervisor, Cathy Edmunds, RN. A regional training plan is developed.
- Hospital capability and ambulance surveys are conducted
- The original EMS project coordinator resigns. Kent Weber, a planning associate with the TRHPC, is named interim project coordinator
- Robertson Dailey is named assistant project coordinator
- Discussion supports establishment of a “sub-council” of the Eastern Shore counties
- The second half of 1974 involves development of a 500+ page federal EMSS grant application. Word is received near the application deadline that the applicant must be a separate regional entity.
- On November 7 the council is incorporated and an organizational meeting of the new corporation is held.
- The new organization thanks the Tidewater Regional Health Planning Council for its guidance and support, and requests continued administrative funding for six months.

<sup>1</sup> Data compiled by Jim Chandler Oct-2013 from the Response newsletter article *TEMS at Ten* by Kent J. Weber (November 1984) and from Tidewater Regional Health Planning Council EMS minutes 1972 through 1974.

<sup>2</sup> Early EMS steering committee membership included several others who were not active attendees including William S. Burton, MD (Eastern Shore internist) and Forrest M. McCoig, MD (ED physician, Hampton). Membership expanded during the two-year period to include Frank M. Yeiser, Jr., founder and superintendent of Norfolk Paramedical Rescue Services among others. Many others, including D. J. Joseph Moore, Executive Director of the Tidewater Regional Health Planning Council, were vital and

active leaders during the formative years of the TEMS Council; however, the meeting minutes from the first two years clearly identify the six individuals named as the earliest EMS leaders.