

Thoughts, Ethics and Actions in Emergency Medical Services (EMS) photography



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“Photography can only represent the present. Once photographed, the subject becomes part of the past.”

Berenice Abbott (July 17, 1898 – December 9, 1991)



To me photography is about capturing a moment, a single moment in time, a single image. Most of us these days are amateur photographers with our camera phones. A picture tells a thousand words they say. A bride on her wedding day, a child killed by a bombing, a beautiful mountain range, a riot, boats, hurricanes, anything you take a photo of is a moment in time, a split second... then its history.

So what role does Photography have in Emergency Medical Services (EMS)?



Its about **education, history, promoting, documenting, recording.**

Looking back on old photographs of the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) we can see how far we have come in terms of equipment, personnel, and training. Without the photos we would have no reference point.



It's a sobering thought that the EMS photos we take today in good faith may in fact be the warnings of tomorrow.

Who doesn't love to look back at photographs when they first started in EMS? Looking to pick out who is still in the job, who has lost the most hair and maybe who has passed away. Sitting around a table, having a cup of coffee with your colleagues, talking about a call you just did, maybe a bad call, someone breaks the tension; "Time for a photo?" Most will smile and join in, some will refuse, each to their own, but a time will come when you look back on these photos remembering not only the bad call but also remembering who had your back that day.



Formal EMS events provide a means to mingle and connect and a chance for a photographer to capture a moment in time, the atmosphere, the faces, the colour, the pomp, but in fact, this is also recording history of the EMS staff at that moment in time.

Rubbernecking

Of course there is a graphic side of EMS photography. Photographers will be held to account to portray individuals and scenes with the utmost respect to the patient and their families¹. Passersby can be opportunistic and sometimes thoughtless at crisis scenes².



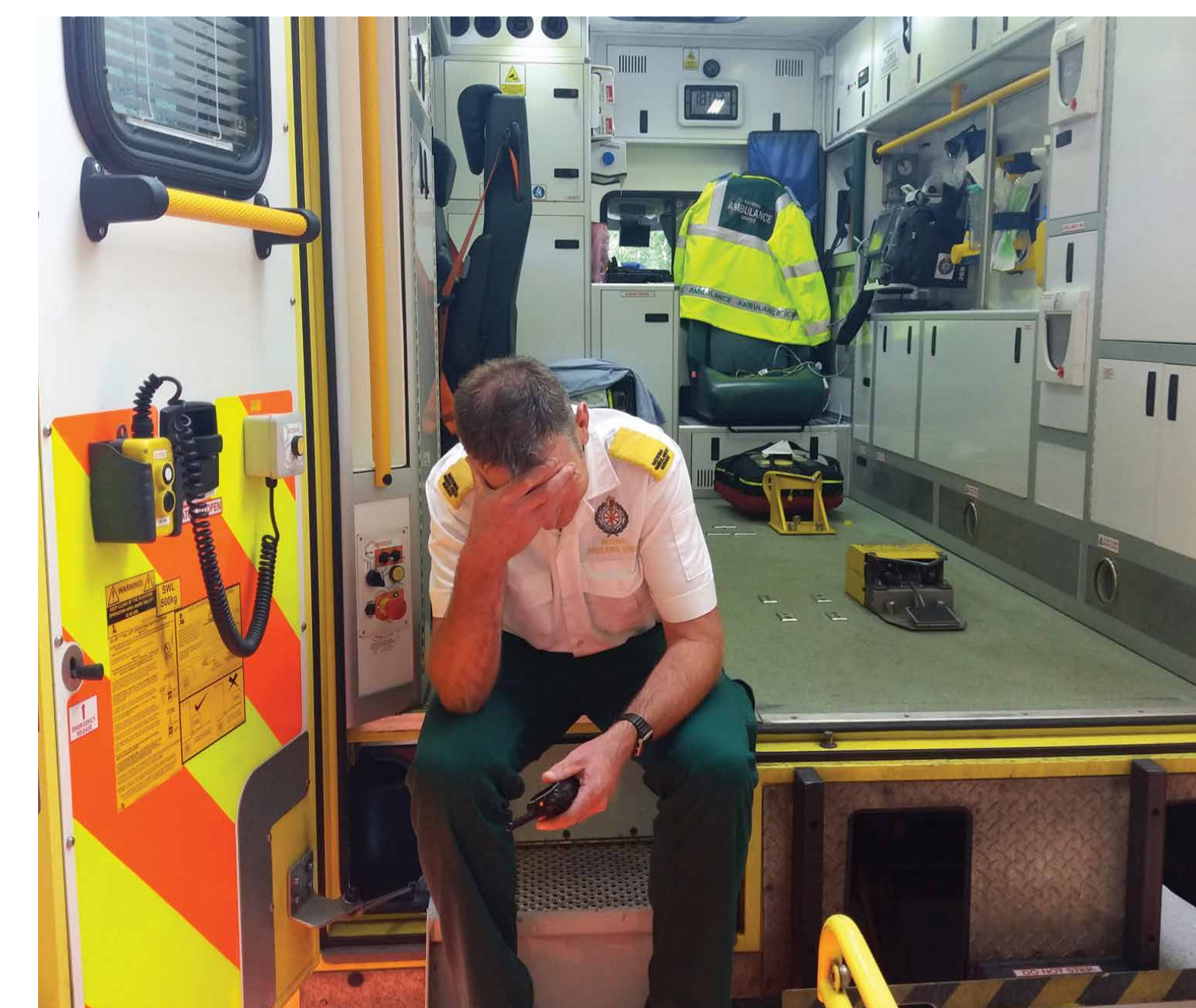
Is it OK to photograph a person their last few minutes? Graphic photos taken by EMS personnel can be used as a training tool, a reference point and a visual aid when you get to the Emergency Department (ED) in our hospitals.



Like a T-boned car, a bullseye impact in the windscreen... a picture tells a thousand words. But where is the line drawn... or is there a difference?

“No, Its Personal”

We all take photos of our ambulances, or colleagues and indeed other emergency services, but we still have a responsibility to protect our other front line colleagues from embarrassment. Underneath that uniform is a person, a husband, wife, mother, father, son or daughter who is taking on and then managing risks. Yes its good to catch them at their best, publicise their work and educate. We are proud of the people who protect us, who help us in our hour of need, who run in to fight a fire when the rest of us are running out and who fight to save the lives of loved ones. A 'smiling selfie' drinking coffee, can cover up the previous callouts of say, an attacking with a bloody syringe, the deafening quiet of the people inside a burning building, or the distressed relatives at the loss of a child.



Take out your cameras, take a photo, a moment in history is saved, and along with the images, emotions are stored. But always with a caution and a nod to the ethical code of conduct above³; The photographer's intent is where the red, blue, green, and white line is drawn...

The National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) Code of Ethics Summary guide expresses this nicely as:

“Photographic and video images can reveal great truths, expose wrongdoing and neglect, inspire hope and understanding and connect people around the globe through the language of visual understanding. Photographs can also cause great harm if they are callously intrusive or are manipulated”



References;
1. <http://www.ukemergency.co.uk/photographing/> Accessed July 20th 2018
2. <http://www.thejournal.ie/taking-photos-at-accident-scenes-waterford-1789311-Nov2014/> accessed July 20th 2018
3. National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) Code of Ethics <http://cw.routledge.com/textbooks/9780805850673/resources/Appendix%20B.pdf> accessed July 20th 2018