

Meet Jonathan Washko, Member Representative for AIMHI, and Former NEMSQA Board Member!

Jonathan Washko, MBA, FACPE, NRP, AEMD, has dedicated 36 years to EMS improvement and innovation, serving too many agencies and organizations to count! He is currently the Assistant Vice President for Prehospital Innovation at Northwell Health Center for Emergency Medical Services, the second-largest 911 agency in New York City. Jonathan is also President and CEO of Washko & Associates, an EMS consulting practice he began in 2005.

As NEMSQA Representative for the Academy of International Mobile Healthcare Integration (AIMHI), Jonathan brings a focus on high-performance EMS and community paramedicine. AIMHI creates resources for services to see how they compare to the best EMS systems nationwide in terms of high-quality patient care, accountability, and employee satisfaction.



“My role is to be looking out the front windshield for innovation, instead of reacting all the time.”

Why did you choose to go into EMS?

The first thing that influenced me was my grandfather dying of leukemia when I was a child. That really cemented that I wanted to go into some sort of healthcare. And then Johnny and Roy did it for me in terms of making the selection. As a kid I used to play with my little matchbox cars of Squad 51, responding to structure fires and all kinds of stuff. I got to take a tour in elementary school of one of the ambulance buildings in Pennsylvania where I grew up, and that was it. As soon as I was old enough, I joined the Fire Department as a volunteer. I went through the fire side thinking that’s what I wanted to do, and then I went into my first real fire and figured out it wasn’t for me. So I defaulted over to EMS, and from the very first call I went on, I was hooked.

If you could change one thing about EMS, what would it be?

How we pay for it. We’re reimbursed for our healthcare mission through insurance revenue, but that’s only one of four hats that EMS wears. We have a public safety hat, a public health hat, a disaster response and mitigation hat, and a healthcare hat. And we get paid for only one of those four things. To solve that, we need multiple revenue sources, one for each of those missions.

What do you think of when you hear EMS quality improvement?

In order to prove our value proposition and get more money, we have to be able to show that we bring value both upstream and downstream. Upstream to the payors, and downstream to the patients: save lives, decrease morbidity and mortality. That’s why NEMSQA’s measures in my purview are some of the most important missing elements of EMS. They are a healthcare initiative under a healthcare framework. I believe that this group could ultimately become the next version of NFPA. There should be the National EMS Academy that can support development of a standards group. That could help fix some of the variability issues. You know, you go to one fire station, you’ve seen them all. But you go to one EMS system, you’ve seen one EMS system. That needs to be fixed.

Are there any projects you want to see NEMSQA take on?

We've got to get through the clinical measure set, but then we need to extend into other places. Operational metrics, patient and provider safety metrics, retention and recruitment, critical failure rates of ambulances and medical equipment. Things no one's really focused on.

What advice would you give to somebody who wants to enter the field of EMS?

The best advice I can give is the same advice that Jack Stout gave me when I mentored under him: "Go work in every type of EMS system you can, and learn about them." Go work in a fire-based system, in a third-service, in a flycar; go work for a private, all of the different service types. Because it will truly help you understand the differences and the importance of the delivery system by which you do medicine.

My advice also depends on why you got into EMS. I got into it because I like to help people. And so my career advanced because I wanted to help more and more and more people. I could do that not by being clinical—because I could only do one person at a time—but by getting into leadership and doing the work I do in the industry. That allows me to touch a much greater population. And if you are looking to do a clinical course in your career, EMS is a great place to start because you get a very unique perspective of the entire healthcare system. You touch it all, every single aspect of it, as an EMS provider. It lets you get a very different, bird's eye perspective on the entire healthcare continuum. And whatever way you go, you'll need to get a mentor. I'm always happy to mentor, so let me know!

What do you like to do outside of work?

I love boating, fishing, the beach, and cooking. Those are my hobby things when I get time to do them. I enjoy and am working to make more quality time with my family (Cat's in the Cradle syndrome) by moving away from some of the industry things I have been passionate about thus far – I'm a workaholic, always have been. My CV's up to 28 pages single-spaced!

Is there a leader, in EMS or outside, you admire or respect most, and why?

There are three that come to mind, and they all have their different places. One is Jack Stout, one's name is William (Bill) Cruz, and the third is Patrick Smith, with REMSA. Jack Stout is the guy that invented high-performance EMS and systems-status management. When I was 18 years old, just starting my Bachelor's degree, I called Jack Stout up and basically spent 6 hours on the phone with him learning about what he did. He really helped develop me in terms of the education that I needed to go get, and helped me blaze my path forward. He's the one that said go work in every EMS system and look at the delivery systems. And then William Cruz (whom my one son is named after) was my first boss, and probably the most influential mentor that I had when I first went into leadership. He very much molded me in terms of how to be a good leader. He provided me the hard criticisms that I needed to hear. It humbled me but also helped forge me into the leadership style that I'm in. And then Patrick Smith was another person who was a huge influence in terms of helping shape my leadership style and approach to taking care of your employees. He showed me how important that is. Those are the three. I've been blessed to have many mentors in life.