
Rebuttal To "EMS Response to Columbine: Lessons Learned"

C Colwell

Citation

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Abstract

To the Editor,

I would like to present a different perspective from that expressed in the article "EMS Response to Columbine: Lessons Learned" (Internet Journal of Rescue & Disaster Medicine, Vol. 5 Issue 1, pp. 48-62) by Howard Mell and Matthew Sztajnkrzyer.

I realize the authors were simply reporting what was published as part of the U.S. Fire Administration Major Incidents Investigation Team report they cited. As I have pointed out to the person listed as the responsible party for that report, however, there is an important inaccuracy which this paper published in your journal then repeated. The final paragraph before the conclusion of the document reports "Unfortunately, prior to deployment, the physician, on his own initiative, assembled a team of on-scene paramedics to search the school with him.

At 4:45 p.m., against orders from law enforcement and fire commands, the physician and his ad-hoc team entered the school to pronounce the dead". I am the physician that was at this scene and whose activities included pronouncing these kids dead, and the statement above is absolutely false. I did go in and do the pronouncements, but it was at the request of, not against, law enforcement.

I think anyone who is familiar with scenes like this understands it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for me to enter "against" law enforcement orders. I also have tremendous respect for law enforcement and the fire department (and in fact, am the medical director for the Denver Fire Department), and would never knowingly refuse or ignore an order or request by either entity. I won't comment further on the "investigation" that lead to the U.S. Fire Administration report, other than to say it did NOT

include any input from me or other Denver EMS personnel who were very involved in this scene. I certainly agree that my communication with what this report refers to as the incident command of this scene could certainly have been better, and if I were put in this situation again, I would absolutely handle the communication and involvement with incident command differently. I learned a great deal from this event, just as everyone else did. I also certainly agree with what I believe the overall purpose of the article you published was; for us all to learn from these incidents so that we can provide the best possible care to the citizens we serve.

I believe EVERYONE taking part in the Columbine incident, as with all other incidents of this nature that I am aware of, would admit they took actions that might have been approached differently by others, and would support the opportunity for everyone to learn from this event. Also important, in my opinion, is to correct inaccuracies where they develop, and under no circumstances were any orders or requests from fire command communicated to me, and it was in fact at law enforcement's request, and under their escort, that I did the pronouncements. There would have been no other way for me to access this scene. The fire and EMS personnel that accompanied me into the building did so of their own determination, not under my order.

I appreciate the author's work in providing an opportunity for others to learn from this incident, and thank you for the opportunity to provide this input.

Sincerely,
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