

**Mark Pinajian**

*Detective*

*Paramus Police Department*

As a detective with the Paramus Police Department and President of PBA Local 186, I worked hand in hand with our Chief of Police to make specific modifications to the work schedules of each individual division to mitigate exposure and cross-contamination within personnel. Under normal circumstances there are several squads and their days of work can overlap to provide the best coverage of our jurisdiction while remaining fiscally conservative. During Covid-19 we eliminated those overlaps however we were still able to maintain a safe environment in the community because of the decrease in call volume. The majority of the calls for service during this pandemic was medical in nature usually resulting in a transport to one of our local hospitals for further care. For our patrol officers responding to these calls we made sure they were outfitted with the proper personal protective equipment, also referred to as PPE, to effectively perform their duties. This included latex gloves, N95 masks, hand sanitizer, and antibacterial wipes.

Additionally safety precautions were taken at our Police Headquarters to ensure everyone's health. A private cleaning company was hired to deep clean the facility every week and fogging machines were purchased to decontaminate rooms and holding cells after any visitors or prisoners were held inside. Those fogging machines were also used to clean police cruisers on a rotating basis to mitigate the spread of the virus in shared vehicles. Personal cleaning supplies were also purchased and donated from generous supporters of law enforcement to be used by the officers throughout their shifts on a daily basis

Luckily we only had two positive cases of Covid-19 within our ranks we were able to continue to do our jobs thoroughly and safely and provide the public with the protection and service they deserve. Hopefully we can all better prepare for the future in the case we have another outbreak or similar situation but let us pray that preparation is never necessary. God Bless Us All!

**Diran Jebejian**

*EMT*

*Fort Lee Ambulance*

As an EMT working for Fort Lee Ambulance, my experiences with COVID-19 allowed me to witness the challenges and difficult decisions people faced in the pre-hospital setting. Our organization responds to over 4,200 calls for service annually, and we are considered to be one of the busier organizations in Bergen County, staffing a minimum of 2 crews 24/7.

While we are already trained to take safety precautions on every call, COVID-19 required us to don additional protections, as many people have seen in the hospital setting. With every patient being treated as if they were a carrier of the virus, two masks and an enclosed face-shield were standard, making communicating with patients challenging. Crews would be forced to raise their voices so patients could hear, making an already uneasy scene more tense.

We were required to instruct patients who could walk to step out of their homes in order to ensure the safety and well-being of our crewmembers. When some patients could not walk on their own, we were subjected to being in small, enclosed spaces with multiple family members surrounding us at times, all of whom may have been carriers of the virus.

One of the most taxing parts of dealing with the virus came when hospitals restricted anybody from accompanying patients to the ER. Watching loved ones cry as they said goodbye to their family, wondering if it was going to be the last time they saw them, was not easy. Families would struggle with whether they should allow a loved one to be transported to a hospital, concerned that they would contract the virus while there, and never come home. On several occasions, I witnessed very sick individuals, who needed medical attention, refuse to go to the hospital out of fear of contracting the virus. They exercised their right to refuse medical care, and as one patient told me, "...die on my own terms," rather than risk acquiring COVID-19. Sadly, many of those patients ended up passing away shortly thereafter.

When hospitals eventually became overcrowded, EMTs in New Jersey were mandated by the NJ Department of Health to triage patients in their own homes. If patients with COVID symptoms did not fall under pre-established criteria to be transported to the ER, we were obligated to tell them we cannot transport them. This was frustrating to many patients who were uncomfortable and nervous, and wanted reassurance that they were going to be okay.

As with any incident in EMS, whether large or small, we take it as a learning experience, and prepare for the next time so we can get better at serving our communities. COVID-19 was a serious test for all of us, not just in EMS, but everywhere. God-willing, we won't have another experience like this for a long time.