Connie A. Meyer
President

At the 2010 NAEMT General Membership Meeting held in Dallas, Texas, on September 28, 2010, then President Patrick Moore provided me an opportunity to share with the members my vision and goals for our association during my term. I announced that my presidency would focus on the safety and wellness of EMS practitioners. I noted that our profession is inherently dangerous because we respond to calls for help where all of the factors on the scene may not be known. These are the unavoidable risks of our job – but many serious injuries and deaths of EMS practitioners that occur are avoidable and are the result of unsafe practices. I also noted that while it is not easy to change our way of caring for patients, change is needed if we are going to protect ourselves and our patients from harm.

NAEMT addresses safety and wellness

Since taking office in January 2011, I have been working with the support of my fellow members of the NAEMT Board of Directors and members of our NAEMT committees to undertake projects that address our safety and wellness needs. In early 2011, our EMS Safety program launched at EMS Today in Baltimore. Since then, 352 courses have been held in 38 states, and we have taught over 1,860 students. Every EMS practitioner should take this course, as it provides fundamental safety training for our jobs. The success of this course would not have been possible without the leadership and dedication of our EMS Safety Program Committee, chaired by Glenn Luedtke and including vice-chair Taz Meyer and members Bruce Evans, Charlene Cobb, Mike Shelton, Mike Szczysgiel and Scott Sholes.

Also in 2011, we embarked on a project to provide our EMS practitioners with a way to anonymously report near-miss and line of duty death information that could be collected and then used in the development of EMS policies and procedures, and for use in educating and preventing similar events from occurring in the future. We were fortunate to be able to partner on this project with the American Council on Exercise (ACE) on an EMS Fitness Project to help improve the health of EMS practitioners and reduce the amount and severity of injuries. The initiative will identify fitness requirements for EMTs and paramedics and develop suggested fitness guidelines that consider the variety of EMS delivery models and environments within which EMS operates. It is our hope that these guidelines will be used by both EMS agencies and practitioners to help improve fitness levels so we all can better do our jobs and avoid injury. Read more about this project on page 14.

NAEMT also is actively participating in the development of a strategy for a national EMS culture of safety. This project is funded through a grant from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). NAEMT’s representative, Glenn Luedtke, serves as a member of the project’s steering committee. Key elements of the strategy will include the advancement of “just culture” values (see the cover article for more about this concept), and coordinated support and resources for EMS agencies.

Although my term as president ends on December 31, 2012, NAEMT’s focus on EMS health and safety will continue and grow. Don Lundy, as NAEMT’s President in 2013-14, will lead our Board of Directors and NAEMT committees in carrying out current and new projects to protect the safety and well-being of our nation’s EMS practitioners. The health and safety of our practitioners and the patients we serve will continue to be of paramount importance to NAEMT. Please share with us your ideas and thoughts on this critical EMS issue at info@naemt.org.

As always, stay safe out there.