

## SEMS Corps



### AmeriCorps Working to Strengthen Emergency Medical Services in Our Rural Communities!

#### **Volunteer Emergency Response—the Cornerstone of Rural Health**

EMS agencies have been the cornerstone of rural health for decades. Many are staffed entirely by volunteers, but a blended volunteer/paid staffing formula is increasingly common. Both organizational structures provide vital services to their respective communities at far



**SEMS Corps member, Amy Linton, serves with Maine EMS.**

*“I joined the SEMS Corps to assist my local community as well as to explore my interest in becoming a full-time EMT; so far I am enjoying myself! My future plans include the possibility of becoming a paramedic, or working in a hospital setting within a cardiopulmonary rehabilitation program.”*

less cost than a paid department could. These agencies have always faced great expectations. Today, increasing expectations are coupled with increasing challenges, and our EMS agencies are caught in the middle.

There is general respect and admiration for the job rural EMS agencies do. However, the agencies themselves, as well as their key players, volunteers, are

often invisible to the public. As individual community members, we need only dial 911 to summon help! We assume that someone will respond and help will come quickly. We rarely think of the actual responders. Volunteers have been key to the ability to fulfill these expectations. They are dedicated individuals who donate countless hours, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

EMS agencies face ever-increasing budgetary pressures that include such basics as vehicle maintenance, fuel, medical supplies and training. Additionally, training and regulations are increasingly complex and intense. It is no surprise that the number of volunteer emergency responders in the area has experienced a steep decline. This has occurred simultaneously to our population aging, and emergency call volume increasing across the region. As a result, EMS agencies in the area face continued strain on an already marginalized system, as the demand for their volunteers’



time has increased greatly. In an effort to provide the level of service communities expect, EMS is becoming more of a paid profession. This is not a viable option for all communities. Today we face an urgent need to bring new volunteers into emergency response.

Many EMS agencies struggle with new volunteer recruitment, call coverage and response times during key hours, and the ability to secure funding. Decreasing coverage dictates decreasing service, which jeopardizes the health of residents served by increasing the response time. This loss is magnified when contracted service must replace volunteer service. The financial burden is being felt in our communities.

## A New Partnership Addresses EMS Challenges

A new component of the Rural Health Network of South Central New York's (RHNSCNY) partnership with AmeriCorps is attempting to address the complex array of challenges rural EMS agencies currently face. Launched in 2011, this unique partnership, **SEMS Corps**, was designed



**Rose Yesalusky, SEMS Corps member with Berkshire EMS, returns from a call.**

*"I love going to work every day where I know I make a difference. Rural EMS is part of who I am. This is what I was meant to do."*

to help rural EMS agencies sustain and build on their critical services to communities. SEMS Corps' goals include improving emergency call coverage; increasing volunteer membership; and increasing revenues.

The program began with partnerships at three Southern Tier non-profit EMS agencies. This is the SEMS Corps formula: each site selects one EMT trained SEMS Corps (AmeriCorps) member who is placed with their agency to provide direct EMS service, support,

volunteer recruitment, and some fund raising activity. The SEMS Corps member reports to the EMS agency for 30-40 hours per week, offering call coverage during times when the agency may most need additional support. The EMS agency must provide training, supervision, and support for the member. The RHNSCNY staff provide technical assistance and guidance for working with the SEMS Corps member throughout the project.

SEMS Corps members' specific charge is to increase EMS capacity in our rural communities. Longer term, they will strive to establish a sustainable, collaborative model for the cost-efficient delivery of improved rural emergency services. This unique partnership offers a new model for providing and delivering rural health services by aligning RHNSCNY's administrative and technical services, and human resources, more directly with the needs of host EMS agencies. It offers members the opportunity to serve their communities while growing and developing as trained emergency medical responders. It offers EMS agencies assistance with meeting the expectations their communities have while addressing some of their current challenges.

*The Rural Health Network of South Central New York extends thanks to our partners in the SEMS Corps project—Susquehanna Regional EMS Council, and the New York State Health Foundation.*



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### **SEMS Corps - AmeriCorps in partnership with Susquehanna Regional EMS Council, Inc.**

*Working to Strengthen Emergency Medical Services  
in rural communities!*

[www.ruralhealthnetwork.org/sems.asp](http://www.ruralhealthnetwork.org/sems.asp)

*"Everyone can be great because everyone can serve."*

—Martin Luther King, Jr.



### **Rural Health Service Corps is a program of the Rural Health Network of South Central New York, Inc.**

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