

# Transitions: Gary Lombardi



Gary Lombardi, MD

In the office of our emergency medicine residency director is a slightly faded picture of two young men, each with a foot resting on the rear bumper of a rebadged school bus that had been reconfigured as a mobile emergency room van, or MERVAN. In the late 1970s and 1980s in New York City, MERVANs were assigned to each borough, the one in the picture having been stationed by the ambulance entrance to the emergency department of Jacobi Hospital in the Bronx. The paramedic on the right side of the picture is a young Wallace Carter, who went on to become an emergency physician at Jacobi, then the EM residency director at NYU/Bellevue, and now the founding residency director of the NewYork-Presbyterian residency program.

The paramedic on the left of the photograph is a young Gary Lombardi, who also went on to become an emergency physician and, until his untimely death last October, was the associate director of what is now the Jacobi Medical Center ED. That the two paramedic partners in the picture would become physicians—as did more than 30 other EMT-Ps from those early paramedic classes—is a tribute both to the pioneering efforts of the late Shelly Jacobson, MD, and also to the close working relationships that emergency physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, paramedics,

EMTs, and techs have always had with one another in the emergency department. In thousands of daily interactions that take place in EDs over extremely ill patients and under less than ideal conditions, these dedicated health professionals function as smoothly and precisely as a well-oiled machine or a symphony orchestra.

But the number of paramedics who eventually become MDs and DOs is also a reflection of the spirit and talents of some highly motivated health care providers who are determined to become physicians and “conduct” those ED orchestras. Gary Lombardi, like several other members of the first few paramedic classes, was not even an EMT when he began his paramedic training; he was an MVO, or motor vehicle operator, paired with an EMT on the ambulance. Later, he was the first member of his paramedic class to become a physician, graduating from the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx in 1982 and from the Einstein/Jacobi EM residency in 1985. Upon completion of his training, he joined the EM faculty there and was a mainstay of the department for the next 24 years.

Even after Gary became a physician, he continued his prehospital care activities until 9 months before his death. An FDNY medical control physician, he provided online direction to the city’s 911 paramedics when the standing protocols were not sufficient. Gary also co-authored a 1994 *JAMA* study that

found that less than 2% of New York City out-of-hospital cardiac arrest victims survived, demonstrating the need for automatic external defibrillators (AEDs) that could be rapidly delivered and ap-

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plied at the scene. Since there could never be sufficient ambulances to accomplish this, NYC police cars and fire trucks now carry AEDs, which are also now widely available in most schools and office buildings. Gary Lombardi’s achievements in both prehospital care and the emergency department provide the best example of what can result from a seamless transition of care from one setting to the other.

Knowing that the end was near, Gary Lombardi wanted to make it to one more medical school graduation, but couldn’t. On June 3, 2010, Gary and Jane Lombardi’s daughter Pamela graduated from the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, as did Gary 28 years earlier; she was hooded by Einstein’s longstanding assistant dean of admissions, Noreen Kerrigan, whom Gary had asked to act in his place. □