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## **Peer Overlap in Collegiate EMS: A Strength That Requires Structural Support**

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# Peer Overlap in Collegiate EMS: A Strength That Requires Structural Support

Clara Shin, NRAEMT

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Shore's recent perspective, "The New Special Population: College Students," highlights collegiate EMS providers as uniquely positioned to deliver empathetic, context-informed care due to their shared identity as students.<sup>1</sup> While this framing is compelling, it underemphasizes an important consequence: the same peer overlap introduces structural psychological burdens that require explicit organizational support.

Collegiate EMS providers often care for peers within their own social and academic networks.<sup>1</sup> Prior work has described the challenges this creates, including emotional entanglement and difficulty navigating the provider–peer role boundary.<sup>2</sup> In practice, this tension may be especially pronounced when the patient is someone the provider continues to encounter in everyday campus life.

This dynamic also extends beyond patient interactions and into team-based care. Providers frequently work alongside peers who are also close friends or classmates, which can complicate real-time communication, feedback, and post-call debriefing. Hesitation to question decisions, offer critical feedback, or openly discuss mistakes may arise not from lack of insight, but from concern about interpersonal consequences within the team. As a result, opportunities for learning and emotional processing may be diminished.

These interpersonal dynamics highlight why individual resilience alone is not enough to address the challenges of peer-based care and teamwork in collegiate EMS. To support effective learning and provider well-being, collegiate EMS organizations need structures that enable providers to speak honestly about difficult calls and learn from mistakes without fearing social fallout within their team. Practical steps could include routine post-call debriefs that incorporate both emotional and clinical processing, designated peer-support or mentorship roles outside immediate friend groups, and leadership practices that explicitly invite reflection, uncertainty, and constructive feedback.

While Shore emphasizes extending empathy toward student patients, collegiate EMS systems must also direct that same intentionality toward providers. The peer overlap that enhances care also increases provider vulnerability and should be addressed through deliberate organizational design.

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