

Episode: *Author Interview: “According to Which Criteria Should a Return EMS Trip of Long Duration and Distance Be Deemed Ethically Justifiable?”*

Guest: Casey Patrick, MD

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

[00:00:03] TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author Interview series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I'm your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative way to access the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Dr Casey Patrick, an emergency medicine services physician in Greater Houston, Texas, who has served as the medical director for Montgomery County Hospital District EMS since 2016. He's here to discuss his article, “*According to Which Criteria Should a Return EMS Trip of Long Duration and Distance Be Deemed Ethically Justifiable?*,” in the July 2025 issue of the Journal, [Rural US Emergency Medical Services](#). Dr Patrick, thank you so much for being here.

DR CASEY PATRICK: Thank you for having me, Tim. I appreciate the opportunity to talk about our work. [music fades]

[00:00:54] HOFF: So, what is the main ethics point that you are making in this article?

PATRICK: Within EMS as a whole, there is a significant subset of patients who end up refusing 911 transport. And much of this stems, in my opinion, from the fact that a lot of folks get 911 called for them, and they are not the primary callers. They're secondary callers. There's bystanders who see patients who may need help, there's rubbernecking on the interstate, all of those things that can happen. And the ethical conundrum arises in that a paramedic crew, an EMT crew, shows up, and a patient may appear ill or have signs of critical illness, difficulty with capacity—and we'll talk about that—and then we're stuck with what do we do? Because they need medical help, but they may not want it, and they may not be able to even make that determination. And so, it can get really ethically murky at times. And so, I believe it's something worth educating EMS as a whole on, and that's why I was thankful to be asked to contribute.

[00:02:09] HOFF: So, what should health professions students and trainees be taking from your article in particular?

PATRICK: I would say that it is an important issue, and it's a foundational issue for your career in EMS, in that you are going to encounter these situations frequently. This is not a low-frequency situation. And so, just realizing that this is a knowledge gap and an educational gap within a lot of paramedic education curriculums, and then into EMS

service education that's provided, knowing and recognizing that is the first hurdle that we have to cross.

[00:02:48] HOFF: And finally, if you could add a point to your article that you didn't have the time or space to fully explore, what would that be?

PATRICK: I believe it's the concept of how to recognize the different tiers of patients who refuse transport. And we hit on it a little bit, but there's varying degrees of risk in the patient who refuses EMS transport. And many patients who refuse are very low risk, and this education and these concepts really don't apply. But when patients have abnormal vital signs or subjective abnormal exam findings or questionable decision-making capacity, then the decision and how to approach them and how to best try to convert them to agreeing to transport is a much more impactful and important decision. And so, having those tools and those educational frameworks with which to fall back on so that you can approach those patients methodically and precisely, just like you would EKG interpretation, those are very, very key. So it's not all refusals of transport. It's a small subset. But within that small subset, I believe is a lot of risk for the patient, for the clinician and the provider, and really, for the EMS service and the public as a whole.
[theme music returns]

[00:04:06] HOFF: Dr Patrick, thank you so much for your time on the podcast today, and thanks for your contribution to the Journal this month.

PATRICK: Thank you, Tim. Anybody that has any questions, feel free to reach out. Happy to answer or share any of our educational materials anytime.

HOFF: To read the full article, as well as the rest of this month's issue for free, visit our site, journalofethics.org. We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.