



**Operation Hammond**  
Herds Helping Herds in Times of Need

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**THE DRINK TANK 357**

# THREE AMBULANCES FOR A DOLLAR

## BY JAMES BACON

America sorta confounds me. It is the most incredible place, but it is America, and is very hewn to the capitalist ideal and therefore everything is really about money.

This is especially so when it comes to health. Right now America has shut down because of Obamacare, which is about insurance. Health Insurance. A whole industry spun out of health, that is for profit.

And what a profit. Pete Stark\* wrote to ten insurance companies and pointed out that in 2010 in the first three quarters they made \$9.2 billion in profit. Profit. It sure is a lot of money...

\$9,200,000,000.

I had a car crash, well someone ran into the back of me, and I went to Hillingdon Hospital, walked in, waited a while, say a doctor, who did lots of things, gave me a prescription and sent me on my way, bruised, sore and with some muscle trauma, but OK. That cost nothing. My address, was asked for. That was it. That'd be free. Well, I pay taxes. That is inevitable. How much I pay there...

\$0

Octocon, Dublin 1994, there is a kerfuffle in the ladies toilets, someone has collapsed, or something Irish Fandom at its rocking best, The Disco has been pumping out heavy music., the dance floor has been heaving, the tables full of fans drinking, many in costumes, and the duty committee member has sprung into action. 'Call the Action Squad', drunken people say. Everyone wonders, a drug overdose, suicidal moment from lack of dance

love, a fight perhaps, the speculation grows.

The Dublin Fire Brigade Mercedes Sprinter Ambulance charges into the grounds of the Royal Marine Hotel, blue lights flashing against the walls, the disco moves to the windows to peer out, men in Blue leap into Action.

Soon, they are off. Everything has been sorted. There is no charge to go to Hospital, although an X-ray bill for a tenner may turn up, but you don't really have to pay for it. But in this instance, the medics do their job, they have administered first aid, added calm and professionalism, and so all is fine and the dance floor moves back to gyrating.

Curiosity means the box must be opened, and soon it is found out.

'Asthma attack'. Nodding heads, 'fucking desperate things', 'like drowning in air', 'all ok then', 'musta been serious', 'bit of Oxygen to sort it eh', "best to call the boys, can never be too sue".

There is little mocking. The cost to anyone, event the convention is...

\$0

Chicon, the main Lobby, I am loving this convention, I am thinking it is a blast, it is fabulous and the Kids programme is going amazing and I am enjoying the night life. It is day time, I am traversing the con, coming from the Office where I smiled at Joyce, down stairs and heading to another set of stairs downward and I am stopped by a fan I know, and we chat and quickly confirm it is all going well.

I am about to walk when another fan stops

me, and asks, 'Are you an EMT?', I am confused, but shouldn't be, I am wearing an EMT shirt from a Fire Station in Arizona, it is a gift, and I am in jeans, and I realise and smile and say, I am not. And in that moment I crush someone. I crush them like I rarely see, like I imagine I would crush the kids, if I showed them 90lbs of Lego and said it wasn't for them. And they are embarrassed, and despite my gentle although slow off the mark realisation, are already apologising and not wanting to talk, I wonder what help she needs and start to speak, but I can see, it is not wanted. And I am alone. I feel like...

.05c.

I do not wear an EMT shirt again.

I am at Arisia in Boston. I love this convention, it is pretty good. They have nicely transcended a number of fandoms, so about 3,000 people of all ages turn up to celebrate. The Dance floor, the main hall, the performances are all busy, fun. The idea of a Duty Committee member is, expanded upon here, in America, we have the Ops room, which includes twenty four hour roving fan security, committee on duty and a bunch of Emergency First Responder's with a considerable amount of kit.

Operation Hammond is a social medical organization. That means they do not operate as an EMT organization which is a protected title in the united states. They officially operate as a Emergency First Response Organization. While they may have EMTs that volunteer, not all members are

EMT's. They have Nurses, First Aiders and other medical professionals that volunteer.

3,000 people for nearly four days. That'd be 15,000 days. Twenty nine years.

A lot happens in twenty nine years. It is not lifetime, it can be a life time, but a lot can happen.

Everything, slips and falls, dehydration, cuts, slices, scrapes and bumps are to be expected, and of course if luck is against you, more serious stuff, seizures, fractures, concussion, cardiac emergencies.

And that's what occurs at Arisia. It is a list. 3 ambulances are called, over a dozen folks receive help. The O.H. team always ready to spring into action. In many ways. Sometimes it is a quiet word of assurance with someone who has come down with a lurgy. I ask a committee person if they know the cost to me as a member, it's about...

\$1

You see a person in an O.H. medical shirt, you can ask them something, you can talk. They are fans, they understand. They have information and that is power. They are powerful and on our side they are Operation Hammond. They can do lots of things, first aid, bandage, tend and most of all listen."

The key here is listening.

People are afraid. Afraid of medical bills, of no insurance, or rubbish insurance and reluctant, but it is explained. If it is something serious, the O.H. Team will tell you, there is no charge to call out an ambulance. And you can sit in it, and the professional EMT's can then asses you.

You got a chest pain. Pale cool and sweaty, 3 minutes of continuous pain in your jaw and arms and it will be an advance life support ambulance that the O.H. team will call, and they will look at you, and hook you up, and you still won't have exposed yourself to a cost. And the O.H. team will be



Op H working with local EMS to aid and assist with medical transport for a injured attendee at ConnectiCon 2013

honest, and you have a second opinion.

There is no charge, and if you have had a heart attack rather than bad indigestion, you can be told so and then decide. You can make an informed decision, is this a time to go to hospital. Is this the time, how much will it cost to find out...

\$0

They are led by 'James Fedora' enthusiastic, committed, determined and yet indiscernibly all fans. They have their idiosyncrasies, like us all and are pretty brilliant. They fund raise, they are a 501 (c) non profit, and they have three tiers of services for conventions to choose from.

I talk to him. We chat, and I say I'd like to write something. It takes longer than I'd like, but I get there on the subject. Medical issues are hard,

they are personal.

There is a critical importance in the liability aspect of a convention rendering medical care to an person at a convention. Operation Hammond have their own private medical liability insurance.

As well as policies and procedures in place to ensure they provide the right level of medical care and when a situation exceeds their level of care they have the knowledge and expertise to get the person the care they need. Whether that care be Calling 911, Going to the Emergency Room, following up with a Doctor or speciality care for various unique medical and psych conditions.

Having their own insurance is key in a litigious world.

Fedora thinks they are the only non profit

organization of it's kind, and they have done over 18 conventions/events since January 2011. Their biggest show to date attendance wise was Anime Boston (Attendance of 21,00) their busiest show to date when it came to people treated and seen was ConnectiCon 2013 with over 500 people seen, assisted and treated.

500 people.

Death is inevitable, but one has to wonder if along that road to our end, we can encounter a brush or two, that isn't actually the end and if that caress from death's scythe happens at a convention, then would something like Operation Hammond stretch the unavoidable. This is really only relevant in America.

Of course, one can just call an ambulance in the UK and Ireland. There is not the same concern or reluctance to trigger a life altering financial disaster, that is weighed against the end of everything one has.

And we cannot make people do something they do not want to. But knowing there is no charge to sit on the tail of an Ambulance. Did you

know that?

So, in the real world, I cannot change things, America is stuffed with her insurance fiasco. Yet in the convention space, the place I go to have a good time, the place where people try to look out for one another, with ways to behave and rules, someone who knows what they are doing, who cares, is not at all a bad thing..

Would you remember it in a time of need. What if you couldn't call at all, don't we need people look out for us at conventions.

For me, I was surprised, as it is surely the Chair who would decide. I do not know the complexities of US cons, but in the UK and Ireland we have always had insurance, and I would wonder about not having the ability to send anyone to hospital, as Chair of a con, because of money.

There are many ways, I know that CapriCon has a team of people, and even a doctor fan that they can call upon.

I do wonder if American Worldcons, with the enthusiasm for Blood Drives and speaking English, would consider a Nurse, a nurse who could

be seen, by fans. We are not social services, BUT conventions do a lot of things, they are a gathering, and a Nurse could have a mixed bag of people. Incidents as well as quiet enquiries.

I do not have the courage to ask some fans, who are friends, good friends, to tell me how an ambulance might have saved someone. It was not a con thing. It is just a sad moment, for many people, and I don't want it to happen at a con I am at.

So for a dollar, or two, or three off my membership, or added to my membership, I'd be happy knowing some girl or dude, will hear the call on the Radio, and leap into action, heft a bag for of kit and sprint through fans, up stair wells, sweating as they pump as hard as they can, pushing through party throngs or down empty corridors, and within moments, someone is there. Someone who not only cares but can do something. The cost not much...

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<https://www.facebook.com/OperationHammond>

\*<http://big.assets.huffingtonpost.com/3qlletter.pdf>



# JAMES FEDORA ON OPERATION HAMMOND

I started to become concerned with the rise in medical issues and injuries I was witnessed during my time staffing conventions. As an EMT, I am morally bound to help people in need, whenever possible, to the best of my ability. It seemed that at each convention I staffed, ranging from the very small to the very large, I was calling more and more ambulances and noticing a steady increase in both the number and variety of medical issues that I personally treated and or assisted in treatment.

Below I have enumerated examples of medical emergencies from conventions large and small, that I have witnessed or assisted with while on convention staff since 2008 (when I became an EMT). This is in addition to my normal non-medical staff job during the conventions. These are only a few of the many experiences I have had.



For liability and privacy reasons, I cannot name the events or provide specifics about each example.

2008: Person broke their finger, person passed out in a bathroom, person fell and hit their head, person with dehydration emergency, person was stabbed in a bar fight next door to the hotel and walked into con HQ for help, person with uncontrollable bloody nose, and many people with sprained and twisted ankles.

2009: Person had a seizure, person had a mental break down/psychotic episode, person passed out drunk in bathroom, person with a fractured hand, person had a dehydration emergency/fainting spell. Person dropped a large metal chair on their foot, person twisted their ankle on the hotel's steps and unresponsive person in a hotel room.

2010: Drunk person fell on stairs, person got hit in the head while dancing, person passed out drunk on floor, person passed out with dehydration/heat stroke emergency, person had trouble walking with weakness due to flu-like symptoms, person had a violent panic attack, fire alarm went off in the convention center causing all 30,000 attendees to evacuate, unresponsive diabetic that turned combative when EMTs attempted to help the person and a unresponsive

person in hotel common area due to possible drug use.

2011: Person fell down a flight of stairs after taking illicit drugs, dehydrated person who could not walk and was weak, person broke his ankle unloading a truck, person cut their wrist after an emotional confrontation with their significant other, person was assaulted and beat up outside of the convention center by an unknown assailant and required immediate medical attention, person had a seizure in the dance and was found unresponsive, person popped their knee cap out of place while dancing, I came across a serious car rollover crash on the way to a convention the person had a serious head injury and required immediate medical care and a person had a urgent case of supraventricular tachycardia (fast heart beat that would not slow down).

2012: Person slipped and fell in a hotel room injuring their head, person had a hypertensive (high blood pressure) emergency and required immediate ambulance transport to hospital, unresponsive child in a hotel room, person cut their foot while using the escalator barefoot, person slipped and fell injuring their back, person was having chest pain in a bathroom and required advance life support and ambulance transport to hospital, a young child had difficulty breathing, was in danger of respiratory arrest and required

ambulance transport to hospital, drunk person passed out in bathroom who was unable to walk and a person fell and hit their head getting out of a bathtub.

Please keep in mind that I don't always staff a convention from an EMT or medical standpoint. However most of my convention colleagues are aware that I am an EMT, which prompts them

to call me for many medical emergencies. For a very long time, at many events and conventions I was performing EMT duties in addition to my normal staff position. I complied with these requests independently for a long time. Eventually it became clear to me, as well as others, that something needed to be done. Further action and organization was required. I came to the conclusion that most conventions are ill-equipped to deal

with the unique medical and social issues that surround the pop culture fandom. These events are all too often completely lacking any formal plan for emergent situations. Furthermore, those events and conventions with plans in place often skirt the edge of legality and/or rely on a loose network of staffers that may or may not have medical training or the proper skills needed to effectively deal with the full social and medical



**Lisa Miray Hayes, Francine Ross, Kyra Rose and Monica**

needs of attendees.

Of all the conventions I have staffed or attended since becoming an EMT (2008), only two included medical departments. I have been staffing and attending fan conventions since 2003, and as an attendee, if I had been aware of a convention medical department I would have utilized it many times. Even fewer had the proper medical services needed to serve the large numbers of people and unique medical needs presented at a fan or pop culture convention.

There is a clear and pressing need for an organization equipped to provide this crucial service for pop culture and fan conventions. Operation Hammond aims to fill this gap, and do it legally and within the scope of practice laid out by national, state and local laws. Operation Hammond has the proper experience and right personnel with the right knowledge in place to embark on this novel and unique mission. To the best of our knowledge, after extensive research, we are the only organization attempting this brand of work within the scope and practice of state, federal and local laws as a nonprofit organization.

Note: We work within the scope and practice of American Heart Association First Aid and the scope and practice of medical first Responders. We work within the confines of the Good Samaritan law, as it pertains to providing first aid to

those in need by a qualified person with proper medical training.

We have the proper insurance to operate in an official capacity. This ensures that our group can both treat ailments/injuries and have the needed medical skills to recognize chronic and emergent medical conditions. This includes

situations that require immediate care and transport to a hospital. Many times, as an EMT I have seen medical issues go unrecognized or untreated due to a lack of proper medical training from staff and bystanders.





# CHRIS GARCIA ON CONS AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL

I grew up with a Dad who was a firefighter. First, he was just a volunteer for the City of Santa Clara Fire Department, and later as a full-time firefighter for The Cities of Santa Clara and San Mateo, and for Moffett Federal Airfield. I remember his beeper, a HUGE red box the size of an early 90s cel phone that caused his belt to sag to one side. He got a lot of calls, a lot of 'em, and sometimes they were dark. I saw a few dead bodies riding with Pops to the scene of various accidents and burns, and I was Dad's best navigator, as I was always able to smell the smoke when it came time to get to the scene.

And there've been a few times at various conventions when there've been some serious medical issues, and though I'm trained in CPR and did the Red Cross Emergency training a few times, I've never actually been at an emergency that required my training. Not only cons, of course, but all fannish, and fan-esque, events. The Lovely & Talented Linda had a fainting spell at a Renn Faire a couple of years back. It was scary, I wasn't there, though I rushed there as soon as I could. Chris Doyle, a bona fide doctor, was and helped Linda and I was so grateful that she was there, and there were also EMTs on site, as almost all Faires have some.

I think it was Milt Stevens who said, one night following a minor medical issue on the par-

ty floor, "Every convention should have at least one doctor and one priest available - the doctor for the moment something goes wrong, the priest for when the doctor's been in the bar."

The problem, so often, is that having medical staff on site is expensive. I know at least two events I've worked with that couldn't afford the required EMTs the city would have required and ended up not happening. Volunteer staff is a great way to go, but in the US it's not always possible because of insurance requirements, though it's not as bad in some areas. Others have arrangements with fans who are EMTs or doctors to provide assistance if the need should arrive. I know of three fans who have done so at cons in LA and San Jose. It's not ideal, but it works.

If I have one thing I'd love to see every con do, it's provide Red Cross Emergency training to any member of their ConComm. Yes, individuals can sign up to get the trainings on their own, but team trainings are so much more effective and easier on everyone if they can be scheduled along with staff meetings and the like. Requiring every member of the upper ConComm (anyone in charge of a department, for example) is not a bad idea at all. Most emergencies (or near-emergencies) can easily be dealt with by someone with a bit of First-Aid Training, and it's not particularly difficult. There are cer-

tainly emergencies that go beyond what First-Aid trained individuals can handle, certainly, but it's at least a solid start. It's a cost-effective way of getting many things handled, at the same time as giving the individuals involved a skill that can be useful both in and out of fandom.

I know of at least one old con that used to offer the training, but I'm not aware of any that do it today. It's an area where we could certainly partner with a community organization and make a difference.

The EMT question is a tougher one. I know when we looked into getting one for an outdoor music festival (that was 1999, ran 8 hours a day for three days) it would have cost us 3500 bucks. Now, I imagine that's a high number, we are in the Silicon Valley after all, that is a relatively small line item for something like a WorldCon, but likely a much bigger deal for something like a BayCon, or especially a CorFlu. That could be a very big deal indeed. In many places, 911 service works very very well, and not too many cons are out in the middle of nowhere (though they do exist!) and the first thing any trained in the Red Cross First-Aid classes learns is to tell someone to call 911.

So, it's an issue and one we should look into. A WorldCon hiring an EMT to be on site, well that should be doable.



UBS Shameless Host an Op H birthday at Arisia — with Jan Dumas, Lisa Miray Hayes, Steve Huff, Francine Ross, Todd Whittmore, Paul Ross, Paige Murray, Garrett DeJong, James Rosse, James Fedora