

SARAH FABIANO, MD '10

Enhancing Prehospital Emergency Care



Sarah Fabiano, MD '10

When an emergency unfolds—on a highway, at a football stadium, or in a living room—what happens before a patient ever reaches the hospital can determine everything that follows. For Sarah Fabiano, MD '10, that critical “prehospital” window has become both her passion and her professional calling.

Dr. Fabiano has emerged as a national leader in prehospital medicine, bridging the worlds of emergency care, education, and research. As medical control physician for Clemson University Fire and EMS and medical director of the *Journal of Emergency Medical Services (JEMS)*, she shapes how emergency responders across the country deliver lifesaving care long before a patient ever sees a doctor.

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Fabiano’s path to medicine began with a master’s degree in physical therapy from D’Youville University. Although she loved working hands-on with patients, she found herself wanting to do more.

That instinct led her to medical school at Upstate. Fabiano credits great support from her advisor, Barry Berg, PhD, and the mentorship of Richard Cantor, MD '76, and Mitchell Brody, MD, in the Emergency Department. She excelled academically and was inducted into Alpha Omega Alpha as a junior and received the SUNY Chancellor’s Award as a senior.

After completing an emergency residency at the University of Rochester, Fabiano moved to Greenville, South Carolina, drawn by a role that combined academic and community medicine—and by the chance to escape Upstate New York winters.

In Greenville, Fabiano found her niche, becoming deeply involved in Emergency Medical Services (EMS), eventually earning board certification in both Emergency Medicine and EMS Medicine—a dual distinction achieved by only a small fraction of physicians nationwide.

Today, her work spans air, ground, and stadium-based EMS systems. As medical control physician for Clemson University Fire and EMS, she oversees emergency care for the university community, including the massive crowds that fill Memorial Stadium each football weekend. Under her leadership, the program has evolved beyond traditional first aid. “We’re treating more people on-site instead of automatically transferring them to the hospital,” she says. “It’s safer for patients and more efficient for the system.”

Her influence extends well beyond campus. Through her role with *JEMS*, Fabiano ensures the publication’s medical accuracy and relevance while mentoring EMS providers nationwide through podcasts, webinars, and conference presentations. She also co-hosts “911 in the 864,” a

popular podcast where she and a colleague dissect real-world cases and explore the latest developments in prehospital care.

Fabiano’s own research focuses on closing critical gaps in early diagnosis and emergency response. One project trains EMS providers to perform a simple finger-to-nose test to identify posterior circulation strokes—a type often missed by standard screening tools. “These strokes are tricky and frequently overlooked,” she says. “We want to give prehospital providers tools that make a difference in the first few minutes of care.” The project has grown into a multi-agency initiative with plans to present findings to the American Heart Association.

Another initiative tackles the issue of 911 system overload. Through a countywide grant-funded program, Fabiano and her team are piloting an alternative response model that routes non-emergency 911 calls—such as minor illnesses or injuries—to community paramedics and nurse practitioners rather than hospital emergency departments.

“People are calling 911 for the same reason they go to the ER—because they don’t have access to primary care,” Fabiano says. “If we can meet them where they are and connect them to the right resources, we can improve outcomes for everyone.”

Even with multiple leadership roles, Fabiano continues to practice clinically three to four days a week across several hospitals, including a Level I trauma center. Her commitment has earned her South Carolina’s Medical Director of the Year award twice, as well as fellowship honors from both the American College of Emergency Physicians and the American Academy of Emergency Medicine.

She’s also an educator at heart, mentoring EMTs, paramedics, residents, and medical students. “There’s nothing more rewarding than watching someone you’ve trained apply their knowledge in a real emergency,” she says. “That’s what keeps me going.”

—Renée Gearhart Levy



Dr. Fabiano conducts training with EMS personnel.