

Meet T.J. Bishop, Assistant Chief of Operations and Training for San Juan Island EMS, and Individual NEMSQA Member!

T.J. Bishop, AS, NRP, NCEE, got hooked on EMS in 1996 after serving as an infantryman in the Army. Now retired from military service after 32 years, he provides field supervision, medical assistance, and an extra set of paramedic hands on calls.

“That’s one of the reasons I took this position,” T.J. said. “So I could still be out helping patients. This is absolutely my dream job.”



What’s something unique about San Juan Island EMS?

The San Juans are a big retirement community, and a tourist area. Our population probably triples in the summer, and the only two ways off the islands are by air or by boat. We pretty much treat and fly anybody that’s having anything serious—trauma, STEMI, stroke, sepsis. They’re never seen in the emergency department, they’re all taken care of by us. We sustain people for a pretty decent period of time. We have a very progressive set of protocols and medical director. We do ultrasounds and give TXA.

The other thing that’s most unique is that when we have to go to one of the other islands, we’ll go onto the sheriff’s boat with our equipment. One of the sheriff’s deputies will captain the boat and we’ll go down to the port with the equipment we think we’ll need. The boat is large enough to take the entire crew plus the patient, if it’s not possible to fly them off the island.

What’s one thing you’re especially proud of doing in your professional career?

I’ve been a senior EMS instructor here in Washington State for well over 20 years. To run into an EMS professional somewhere in the state that I see is doing very well, where I can look back and go, “I helped train that person.” Seeing how people grow and how what you contribute makes a difference.

When I retired from the Army, I retired at the highest enlisted grade, and I was pretty much in charge of a hospital. The biggest thing that I remember is taking care of soldiers, and doing what I could to see them become successful. Occasionally I get emails and feedback on how some of those things stick out in people’s heads. I’ll get a text message months later still asking me professional development questions. It just helps to solidify why we sacrifice and do what we do.

What’s your role with quality improvement at San Juan Island EMS?

In my job now, I do a lot of high-level, broad QI measures to help not only our agency but the entire county. Our medical director reviews 100% of our cases. I work with him and our staff to help improve processes and equipment and systems in order to make everything work more efficiently. I work a lot with our local hospital and some other agencies to improve the system. I helped the medical director redesign our continuing education program that the entire county’s using.

The biggest passion I have with quality improvement is that it’s a complete cycle, and there’s no end stage. It’s a circle. It continually moves, from the time that we come in contact with one patient, all the way through to when we take care of the next. It just continues to rotate and evolve.

What do you like to do outside of work?

My wife and kids and I do a lot of hiking, and a lot of traveling. The next place we’re going will probably be the Keys in Florida, to take the kids for dolphin therapy. They’ve been closed for three years because of COVID and are just now reopening!