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Guest Editorial

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Abbreviations:
EMS: Emergency Medical Services;
PDM: Prehospital and Disaster Medicine;
WADEM: World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine

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Marvin L. Birnbaum, MD, PhD

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Abstract

Marvin L. Birnbaum, MD, PhD passed away in May 2026. He was a pioneer and leader in both Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and Disaster Medicine. He was dedicated to developing EMS and Disaster Medicine as professions and academic disciplines. Dr. Birnbaum was Editor-in-Chief of Prehospital and Disaster Medicine (PDM) for 23 years and served terms as the World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine (WADEM) President and was a member of the WADEM Board of Directors for 35 Years. This editorial is a tribute to Dr. Birnbaum.



Marvin L. Birnbaum, MD, PhD.

In May 2026, the international disaster medicine and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) communities lost a major leader and innovator. Dr. Marvin L. Birnbaum (Marv) was a prominent leader and organizer of both fields. In October 1976, he was one of the primary organizers of the World Association of Disaster and Emergency Medicine (WADEM; Madison, Wisconsin USA). For the next fifty years following the establishment of WADEM, Marv, joined by his wife, Elaine Daily Birnbaum, RN, BSN, were a team of prominent advocates and leaders of the organization.

Marv led in the creation and publication of *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine* (PDM), for which he was the Editor-in-Chief for 23 years. Marv built PDM into an internationally indexed journal known for publication of innovative scientific papers focused on Disaster Medicine and EMS. Marv's commitments as PDM Editor-in-Chief and his on-going contributions to WADEM required intense amounts of commitment and focus.

Dr. Birnbaum's medical training included specialization in Internal Medicine, subspecialty training in Pulmonary Medicine and Critical Care, with post-doctoral education in cardio-pulmonary physiology. Marv served as a flight surgeon in the United States Air Force, receiving the United States Air Force Commendation Medal. An important contribution in his career was the creation and management of one of the first combined medical-surgical intensive care units at the University of Wisconsin Medical Center (Madison, Wisconsin USA). Marv was well-known for his innovations in the early development of EMS systems in the United States and his efforts to develop EMS into a recognized medical service and subspecialty. He personally taught Wisconsin emergency medical technicians as part of the preliminary implementation of one of the first organized EMS systems in the United States. In 2000, Marv was honored by the *Journal of Emergency Medical Services* as one of the "Most Influential People in EMS" in recognition of his dedication to the early development of EMS. Despite his medical background, extensive contributions, and service to the medical professions, few knew of his accomplishments due to his humble personality and lack of vanity.

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Marv was an internationally recognized leader in the development of Disaster Medicine as a professional field of medicine. He continuously worked to establish Disaster Medicine as an evidence-based discipline. He brought rigor to medical research and supported sound field medical techniques in Disaster Medicine. In 2015, he was the author of a series of papers titled "Research and Evaluations of Health Aspects of Disasters." Marv maintained a global perspective in his own scholarly disaster work and in the broader advancement of Disaster Medicine. Marv was also a resolute educator who helped many of today's disaster medical professionals and researchers build their careers. He was a resource for the World Health Organization (WHO; Geneva, Switzerland) and helped lead in the international application of evidence-based disaster relief and medical efforts.

While Marv held a strong international reputation for his work and leadership, his contributions to mentoring future generations of EMS and disaster medical providers and scholars is one of his most lasting overall contributions to better world society. His support, mentoring, and education of many (including this author) were beyond that of most people of his prominence. He was effective as a mentor because of his understanding of people and unpretentious nature. He had the uncommon ability to educate and direct without use of deep critique or criticism. His patience and fatherly attitude with those developing EMS and Disaster Medicine careers were enormous. Any of us today who are working or with interest in the fields of EMS and Disaster Medicine owe Marv for his early development and on-going contributions to these areas of medicine and science.

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