

The French emergency medical aid service (SAMU) is celebrating its 50th birthday

In 1955, three doctors - namely professors LARENG in Toulouse, CARA in Paris and SERRE in Montpellier - noted the dramatic discrepancy existing between the means used at the admission in hospital of a sick or seriously injured person and those always either very summary or archaic that were used before the admission, during the long minutes following an accident or malaise.

Those three doctors were to undertake what appears as an adventure. They found ambulances that they equipped with gears found in hospital units and made themselves available to the national rescue services such as the police or the fire brigade.

The sceptical and doubtful position of the administration, and the ironic or even condemning stance from hospital staff show how little supported this project was at first. Why such a reaction? Probably because urgency was disrupting, and habits, threatened. Is the role of doctors themselves to deliver medical rescue services? Such was the question present in many people's mind, and so, for almost twenty years through the 60-70s'.

In that spirit, the victims who happened to die before their admission in hospital were considered as unlucky fellows. Nothing more. Fortunately, all this began to change when the Ministry of Transport, in its efforts to improve road security, gave the three doctors' initiative the chance to blossom.

As far as the Ministry of Health was concerned, only one civil servant, Monsieur COIRIER, led an enthusiastic and modern policy by supporting the development of the emergency medical aid service (SAMU) and of the mobile resuscitation and emergency service (SMUR). Only later in time would the French National Health Insurance agree to meet the cost of this new pre hospitalisation medicine. During the 70s', despite all the obstacles, the SAMU became more and more numerous and the SMUR intervened massively in each county. Eventually, in 1976, a bill was passed that defined the existence of the SAMU for the first time and created a hospital service bearing this name.

In 1986, a bill on emergency medical aid made the former bill even more precise and effective: the missions of the SAMU were clearly defined; a national telephone number (15) was allocated to each SAMU in each county; and finally, a centre for the reception and regulation of medical calls was created. Today, in France, this centre is famously known as "le centre 15".

- With this report, an interview with Professor Lareng.