

Freedom House Ambulance Service: The Origins of Modern Paramedicine



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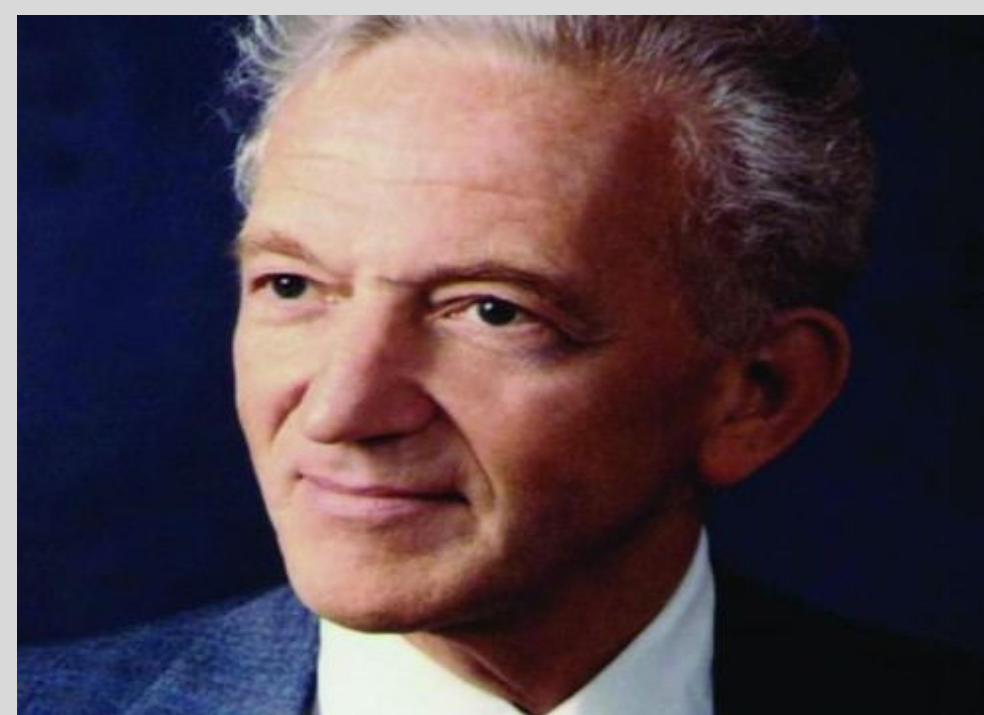
INTRODUCTION

Freedom House Ambulance Service was established in Pittsburgh in 1967 as a collaboration between Freedom House Enterprises and Presbyterian-University Hospital. It primarily serviced Oakland, the Hill District, and Downtown, and was largely staffed by African-Americans from the Hill District. In its eight years of operation, Freedom House became a pioneer in emergency medical services (EMS) and made Pittsburgh a center for emergency care.

Research Purpose

- Foster appreciation for a minority organization forgotten by its respective field
- Establish the service's impact on the design of paramedic curriculum
- Highlight the organization's importance to the African-American community

RESEARCH SOURCES



Peter Safar Papers: University of Pittsburgh Special Collections
Freedom House Ambulance Records: Heinz History Center Archives

SERVICE ORIGINS: A THREE-FOLD PURPOSE

Provide meaningful employment for the African-American Community

Provide the African-American community with access to emergency services

Test new training initiatives for EMS providers to decrease mortality in the out-of-hospital setting

PIONEERING PARAMEDIC CURRICULUM

Oct
1967

- The first class of trainees embarks on a 12-month training program that becomes one of the first to train to an EMT level¹
- Pilot training programs for paramedic level curriculum begins

1968-
1975

- Freedom House training curriculum is continually refined based on trainee success and feedback
- Employees are functioning as some of the nation's first paramedics by April 1975

Jul
1975

- Freedom House medical director Dr. Nancy Caroline wins a grant from the government to create a national standard paramedic curriculum, which she bases on the Freedom House training curriculum

Oct 1975

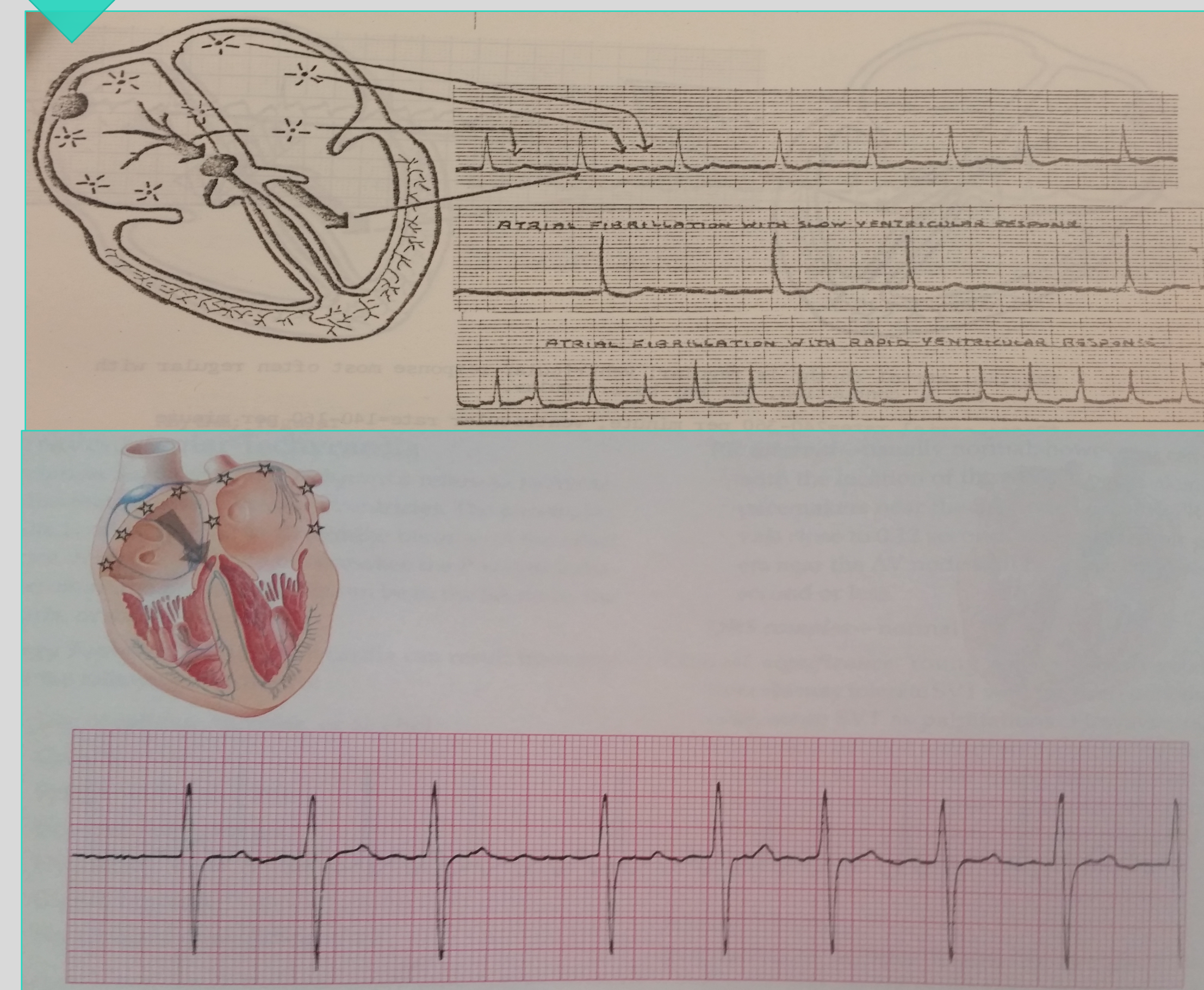
- Freedom House Ambulance Service ceases operations due to financial troubles
- The service is absorbed into the city EMS service which, based on Freedom House's model system, becomes a national success in emergency care

Dec
1975

- Dr. Caroline submits her national standard curriculum, *Emergency Care in the Field: A Manual for Paramedics*, which is later published by the government in 1977

2016

- Paramedic textbooks and clinical training programs are founded on the same knowledge base established by Dr. Caroline's national standard curriculum



Visual representation of the pathophysiology of atrial fibrillation from Dr. Caroline's curriculum (top)² and a 2016 paramedic textbook (bottom)³. Modern paramedic textbooks still utilize graphic aids created by Dr. Caroline to help Freedom House trainees learn, which she later placed in her own textbook.



Freedom House paramedics were trained in skills like IV placement, intubation, and defibrillation, which were never previously performed in the out-of-hospital setting.

"When I go into some of the poor, black neighborhoods, the kids gather around and talk to me. They are impressed to see a black man like myself in a responsible position. Their attitude is 'gosh if he made it, maybe I can'."⁴

-Daniel Thomas, Freedom House Employee



Freedom House employees with the medical leadership from Presbyterian-University Hospital.

Many employees were considered "unemployable blacks" before being recruited to train. After being hired by the city EMS when Freedom House closed, racial tensions caused most to find healthcare jobs elsewhere while others returned to the streets, unemployed once again.