CoAEMSP
Credible education through accreditation

Committee on Accreditation
of Educational Programs for the
Emergency Medical Services Professions

CoAEMSP

Graduate and Employer Surveys: When, Why, and Challenges

We know accredited programs are required to complete satisfaction surveys of graduates and employers but what purpose do these questionnaires serve? Is it just one more requirement? Historically it is difficult to find some graduates, and hence their employers, once they leave the program, so does it really matter and is it worth the effort? The answer to both questions is 'yes' and 'yes'.

Paramedic programs are outcomes based and the most important outcome is the ability of the graduate to function as a competent provider of advanced level care. Students are assessed in a summative format at program exit for their ability to function as competent at the entry level. However, the only way to adequately assess the individual's ability as an independent practitioner is to gather assessment information from the graduate and the employer following a period of practical application of the knowledge, skills, and abilities as a practicing, certified or licensed Paramedic. The graduate who felt confident at the completion of the education program may find they have a significant knowledge gap in a particular area, or the employer may determine that the employee lacks certain skills or abilities in one of the three domains: cognitive, psychomotor, or affective. A formal feedback mechanism is essential to allow the program an opportunity to continue to improve and monitor the education process.

The graduate and employer survey process is structured to attempt to capture this data for all graduates employed as a Paramedic in the six to 12 month period following program completion. These surveys are not exit surveys from the Program: inclusion of these surveys at program completion does not meet the purpose or provide the appropriate outcome information.

The challenges in obtaining this documented feedback are well known:
- The program is not able to contact the graduate and does not have information on the individual's employment status. The contact information on file may not be current, i.e., email and cell number.
- Student contact information is available, but the individual does not return requests to complete the survey or information on the current employer.
- The employer is not known.
- The employer does not return the survey. In some cases, employers have anecdotal concerns that the survey information may be viewed as part of the employer evaluation process for the employee and may be reluctant to participate.
- The survey goes to the appropriate employer, but not to the individual responsible for observation and evaluation of the graduate.
- Graduates complete at different times and there is no consistent program end date and subsequent six-month trigger to send the surveys.
- It is easy for the program to overlook the 'send' due date.
- The graduate is not employed as a Paramedic immediately after program completion, so when does the six-month period start and how are dates tracked across graduates?

Graduate and employer satisfaction are required outcome threshold metrics. Historically, the return threshold for the surveys was set at 70% and was subsequently reduced to 50%. Due to the challenges enumerated regarding obtaining survey returns, the CoAEMSP Board later changed the requirement threshold that 100% of surveys were sent. This has also proved to be a challenging metric. For example:
- How can I send a survey if I cannot locate the graduate or employer?
- Some graduates are not employed in a Paramedic role immediately upon program completion for a variety of reasons. Perhaps no Paramedic position is available in the area. The individual may have to wait for an opportunity to 'promote' to a Paramedic role in the organization. The individual who

is continuing their education or is in the military is counted as 'placed' for purposes of the job placement threshold but is not functioning as an independent practitioner in the EMS field. In these examples completing graduate and employer surveys does not provide the important information intended.

- Some graduates may continue in an EMT or AEMT role in an EMS agency or a healthcare facility and therefore are not in a professional role as a Paramedic. As stated in the CoAEMSP Interpretations of the CAAHEP *Standards*: 'A related field is one in which the individual is using cognitive, psychomotor, and affective competencies acquired in the educational program'; in this case a Paramedic program.

In an effort to improve the survey return rate, the CoAEMSP streamlined the queries in the surveys to three basic questions: is the graduate competent in each of the three domains: cognitive, psychomotor, and affective? Rather than a Likert type scale, the response options are: successful/competent, marginal; unsuccessful, or NA. For each of the three domains, if the individual is rated as marginal or unsuccessful, additional prompts/topics are provided: safety; patient assessment and history; wellness; documentation; pharmacology; medical emergencies; trauma; operations; special considerations (pediatrics, geriatrics, etc.); introductory (medical legal, pathophysiology, airway, etc.); other (please list). Programs are free to add additional and more in-depth questions to their survey but must use at least the items required by CoAEMSP.

The change in the items and rating scale has increased the response rate but returns are still a challenge. Suggestions for obtaining the data include:
- Electronic survey tools are available through CoAEMSP SurveyMonkey forms.
- The program can build the same questions in a different electronic format that meets their needs.
- Paper copies are acceptable and are easy to distribute to employers at an Advisory Committee meeting for example.
- Employers can rate more than one graduate on the survey, as long as the ratings are the same and the number of graduates being evaluated is stipulated.
- A program staff member can contact graduates and employers by phone to review and document the questions.

Additional recommendations include:
- Obtain employment information from each student before they leave the program. Ask them to keep the program updated regarding employment changes and changes in contact information. The Graduate survey should not be the primary means of determining placement.
- Send follow-up email and/or text reminders that the survey is coming.
- Let graduates know that emails from an electronic provider may go to a spam folder.
- Set calendar reminders for faculty and administrative staff when surveys are due to be sent.
- Surveys can be anonymous but attempt a mechanism to determine who has returned the survey and who need reminders.
- Suggest that graduates follow the program Facebook page, and post announcements when the survey is launched.
- If possible, in your organizational structure and budget, offer inducements for completing the survey, such as a small gift card for coffee or food or enter respondents into a drawing. However, this approach does have the potential to negate the perception of anonymity.

Beginning with the Annual Report (AR) for the 2018 calendar year, the AR will request the number of surveys sent to, and received from, placed graduates, employers of graduates, the program's analysis of the survey information received, and the action plan of the program to incorporate the data to improve their program.

Graduate and Employer surveys should provide important data for Programs in evaluating effectiveness and perceptions of competency.