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Addressing the EMS Workforce Shortage Through Educational Excellence

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As members of the EMS profession, we care for everyone. That is the theme of this year's EMS Week and it is more relevant – and urgent – than ever.

EMS professionals play a critical role in every community. But unfortunately, in far too many communities, there simply aren't enough EMS professionals available. The ongoing workforce shortage is real, complex and growing.

We know there are multiple factors driving the current shortage. As such, solutions will need to be varied throughout every aspect of the EMS professional lifecycle.

One place to start is at the beginning, with paramedic education.

We know from data collected by the Committee on Accreditation of Educational Programs for the EMS Professions ([CoAEMSP](#)) that more paramedics are entering the field. Between 2018 and 2022, the latest years for which [data](#) are available, CoAEMSP measured the following progress for accredited paramedic education programs nationwide:

- 9.4% increase in enrollment
- 11.2% increase in graduates
- 79% average retention rate
- 88% National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians (NREMT) exam pass rate
- 93% positive placement
- 60,000+ new paramedics employed

Paramedic students must graduate from a paramedic education program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs ([CAAHEP](#)), or those who have attained the CoAEMSP

Letter of Review (LoR), in order to be eligible to sit for the NREMT exam, which is recognized in every state and is required in 47 states to be eligible for a paramedic license.

CoAEMSP is the only organization recognized by CAAHEP to provide accreditation services for paramedic and, beginning in 2025, AEMT education programs.

What do all these statistics mean? Accreditation for paramedic education is delivering more and more competent paramedics ready to enter the workforce. Nationally certified paramedics can deliver quality care anywhere in the nation, creating opportunities for individuals and employers alike.

Another way to look at it: accreditation is addressing the workforce shortage, not contributing to it.

These numbers are encouraging. But we can and must do more. It is estimated that 21% of paramedic students do not complete their education. That translated to more than 3,500 potential paramedics in 2019 alone. Another 11% (or more than 1,800 students) did not have the minimal competency to pass the Registry exam. That's more than 5,400 *potential* paramedics lost in one year.

It does not have to be this way. We can further increase the number of paramedics entering the field without sacrificing quality.

For example, CoAEMSP has data showing that several factors contribute to higher student attrition. Programs with open enrollment policies that do not administer a medical knowledge exam as part of the admission process have higher student attrition rates. Programs with fewer than 12 students or that take more than 12 months to complete are also more likely to have higher attrition rates. Conversely, wrap-around services (tutoring, counseling, career planning) may be critical for increasing retention of some students.

How do we get more paramedic education programs to adopt strategies for success, and abandon those that are not generating good outcomes?

That's where accreditation comes in. The Standards & Guidelines that govern paramedic education programs ultimately generate better outcomes for students. The accreditation process is designed to share innovations and best practices and drive continuous quality improvement. And that in turn improves the safety and wellbeing of our communities.

Accreditation is one way we can get closer to our shared goal of taking care of everyone.

As part of this year's EMS Week, let's all commit to embracing innovative approaches throughout the lifecycle of an EMS professional – from education through to workforce retention – that result in more qualified individuals entering, and staying in, the EMS field.

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