Entry Level and Ongoing Education Policy

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Author Branch  Ambulance Education Centre

Branch contact  Alan Morrison

Division  Clinical Development

Summary  This SOP outlines Ambulance policy in relation to entry level education for new paramedic recruits and ongoing education for the existing workforce

Applies to  All Ambulance Service of NSW staff
All Operational Staff
All Administration staff
All Headquarters staff
Division staff (select Aero medical, Northern, Southern, Sydney, Western)
Operations Centres (select All, Aero medical, Northern, Southern, Sydney, Western)

Review date  November 2012

Previous reference

Status  Active

Approved by  Chief Executive

Compliance with this policy directive is mandatory.
Purpose

This policy has been developed in response to Recommendation 25 of the Head Performance Review into the Ambulance Service NSW. This recommendation states:

“That the Ambulance Service develop a policy by the end of January 2009 concerning the minimum educational requirements for new paramedic recruits and ongoing training needs for the existing workforce.”

The purpose of this policy is to ensure the ASNSW maintains a highly skilled and flexible clinical workforce which is able to meet the demands posed by a dynamic out of hospital care environment.

The policy outlines the Ambulance position on education and training in relation to:

1. Entry level education for new paramedic recruits
2. Ongoing education for the existing workforce

This policy should be read in conjunction with SOP’s 2007-101 to 2007-119 inclusive.

Introduction

Education strategies supporting the initial or ongoing development of paramedics should fundamentally reflect the nature and complexity of the work engaged by paramedics in an environment subject to constant and rapid change. Paramedic practice has been described “as evidence based health care that applies vocational and academic disciplines that are often experienced in a variety of complex situations across the health illness continuum” ¹

The provision of health care by Ambulance to the community continues to evolve. Paramedics as first contact health workers responsible for the quality of care they provide for patients require the support of robust entry level and ongoing educational systems. These systems must ensure minimum educational standards are maintained.

Paramedic Role

Paramedics provide advanced out of hospital, unscheduled care and related transport services to the community. Paramedics are required to take responsibility for making significant clinical decisions in a varied and often complex environment. To effectively perform this role paramedics are required to:

- recognise and assess appropriate symptom-syndrome patterns and subsequently plan and initiate appropriate patient management consistent with protocols and the scope of practice of a paramedic
- provide and/or assist with care during the transport of patients of all ages suffering from illness, injury or disability, whether physical or mental, acute or chronic. This may at times include retrieval or escorted patients
- apply skills, techniques and knowledge for safe, efficient and effective operation of Ambulance medical equipment and procedures in a pre-hospital environment consistent with the scope of practice of a paramedic

¹ Extract from British Paramedic Association Curriculum consultation document: June 2005, page 7
Standard Operating Policy

- ensure that care and treatment is maintained on arrival at hospital, until responsibility is handed over to the appropriate personnel
- to work independently or as part of a team
- communicate and work effectively with other agencies’ personnel and other members of the health care system
- manage the associated social, cultural, religious, emotional and communication aspects of sick and injured persons, their relatives, carers and bystanders
- practice as a paramedic within an appropriate ethical and professional construct whilst adhering to relevant legislation, regulations and industry policies
- mentor staff progressing through entry level education programs in the development of paramedic practice.
- maintain a Certificate to Practice to ensure clinical skills and knowledge remains current and up to the standard required of the role.
- engage in self critique and reflection to improve their own clinical performance

Entry level and ongoing education must address the nature and requirements of the paramedic role.

Entry Level Education

Ambulance requires suitably educated and trained paramedics to ensure it satisfies its service delivery models. Ambulance acknowledges the importance and value of maintaining a workforce reflecting the cultural diversity of the wider community. In the current context of limited availability of people sufficiently capable or skilled to undertake a range of health worker roles, Ambulance recognises the necessity to maintain a variety of entry level education pathways to ensure access to a suitable supply of new paramedic recruits.

1. Minimum Entry Level Paramedic Qualification

   I. The current minimum qualification for the position of Paramedic is a Diploma of Paramedical Science (Ambulance) from an institution recognised as a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) under the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF).

   II. The preferred minimum qualification for the position of Paramedic is a tertiary degree in out of hospital care from a university accredited by the Council of Ambulance Authorities, Paramedic Education Programs Accreditation Committee (PEPAC).

Ambulance acknowledges and endorses the current industry transition to tertiary qualification for paramedics entering the workforce. Tertiary education is recognised as the most appropriate means to ensure paramedics develop the necessary knowledge, skills and attributes commensurate with the current and evolving role. Ambulance will actively engage strategies to increase its recruitment of tertiary qualified paramedics over the next five years for those positions where an undergraduate degree is deemed appropriate.

Once the status of recommendations of the Garling Report in relation to the Ambulance Workforce are known, Ambulance will finalise a transition plan which will establish a tertiary degree as the minimum qualification for entry to paramedic.

Ambulance will maintain its capacity to deliver VET qualifications to align with the transition plan to tertiary qualification for paramedics and recommendations from the Garling Report.
Ambulance recognises the importance of maintaining quality mentoring and support frameworks for new paramedics emerging into their role through entry level education. The transition to tertiary entry level education will create opportunities for Ambulance to redirect educational resources toward further extending its mentoring and support framework to ensure quality health care standards are achieved and maintained by new paramedics.

2. Entry Level Education Pathways

I. Accelerated Graduate Pathway

Ambulance will collaborate with PEPAC accredited universities in the establishment and maintenance of an accelerated graduate pathway for paramedic students. Ambulance will develop a trajectory to establishing this as the predominant pathway for satisfying paramedic workforce requirements.

Selected students will be recruited to this pathway during the first year of their degree and offered a conditional offer of employment with Ambulance. Students must satisfy standard Ambulance selection criteria for employment. Recruits will complete an accelerated 2 year fulltime degree program before commencing an internship with Ambulance during their third year.

Recruits undertaking this pathway will be recognised by Ambulance as qualified paramedics at the completion of the internship and paramedic degree.

II. New Graduate Intern Pathway

Ambulance will maintain a New Graduate Internship pathway for recruits who have completed a paramedic degree from any PEPAC accredited university. New graduates may apply for selection into this pathway during the second or third year of their degree pending evidence of successful completion of course requirements when available. Students must satisfy standard Ambulance selection criteria for employment.

Recruits undertaking this pathway will be recognised by Ambulance as qualified paramedics at the completion of the Ambulance internship program.

III. Vocational Pathway

Whilst Ambulance will transition to sourcing paramedic recruits from the tertiary sector, capacity to deliver the Diploma of Paramedical Science (Ambulance) internally will be maintained until:

1. It reaches a position in which ongoing paramedic workforce needs are absolutely assured in arrangements with tertiary providers; and,

2. The position regarding proposed paramedic assistants is known.
Ambulance will maintain its accreditation as an RTO, fulfilling the registration requirements of VETAB under the AQTF. The Diploma course curriculum will reflect the regulatory work role requirements of the current Community and Health Services Industry Skills Council Training Package, VETAB, PEPAC and Ambulance.

Recruits undertaking this pathway will continue to be recognised by Ambulance as qualified paramedics at the completion of the 3 year diploma course.

The vocational pathway represents an important strategy enabling Ambulance to remain responsive to future workforce trends. Australian health workforce trends may necessitate the development of alternate out-of-hospital care roles to ensure maintenance of adequate services by Ambulance. The vocational paramedic course pathway will be constructed to allow an exit point at the Certificate IV level after 12 months to support the emergence of new roles if required.

Ongoing Education for Existing Workforce

The out of hospital environment is characterised by constant and rapid change and a growing body of knowledge that will continue to influence scope of practice for paramedics. Ambulance and paramedics share responsibility for the quality of care delivered to the community.

Ambulance has a responsibility to maintain a system to ensure its existing paramedic workforce can:

1. maintain currency in clinical practice attributes identified as mandatory by Ambulance
2. recognise independent engagement by paramedics in continuing development to expand their body of knowledge in out-of hospital care.

1. Certification

Certificate to Practice (CTP) is the system of authorisation to practice. Within that system, paramedics will be expected to maintain currency in the established scope of practice and gain recognition for their independent engagement in continuing development. This system also facilitates orientation to minor variations or alterations to practice.

The requirements for CTP are described in current SOPs:

- 2007-107 Certification Policy
- 2007-108 Scope of Practice
- 2007-109 Activity Leave Entitlements
- 2007-110 Compliance
- 2007-111 Certification Assessment for Stream 1
- 2007-112 Certification Assessment for Stream 2

Paramedics must satisfy requirements every three years prior to the expiry of their current CTP. Paramedics who do not meet CTP requirements will be managed in accordance with CTP compliance policy. CTP authorises a paramedic to practice for three years.
2. Clinical Developments

Ambulance will provide in-service education to all paramedics where developments in clinical interventions are identified as essential to meeting or maintaining the quality of care expected by the community. These clinical developments will generally exceed the requirements of CTP.

Ambulance will conduct appropriate in-service education with paramedics in each 18 month period to support clinical developments in accordance with its strategic priorities. Paramedics will be required to satisfy assessment requirements associated with the education program and subsequently implement changes in accordance with Ambulance policy.

Changes in provision of healthcare resulting from clinical developments will result in safe and effective patient outcomes if paramedics have the opportunity to integrate and assimilate changes appropriately. In some instances Ambulance may be subject to multiple demands to implement new developments. Ambulance will prioritise changes in these circumstances to match in-service education availability and give due consideration for the ability of paramedics to safely understand and implement multiple changes to clinical practice. This will be influenced by the complexity of any changes.

Policy Review

This policy is due for review in November 2012.