Common Ground Position Statement on EMS Education & Degrees

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Introduction:

In recent years, the EMS profession has engaged in multiple national processes to craft guiding, visionary, and seminal documents. These national EMS documents include Agenda 2050, Scope of Practice, and Education Standards. The significant role of education in our profession was discussed and noted throughout the creation of these documents. Dialogue on the role of degrees in the EMS profession occurred as well, but a clear consensus was not reached. This common ground position statement aims to serve the EMS profession in identifying broad points of agreement and disagreement pertaining to EMS education, including degrees, amongst the adopting organizations.

Agreement:

Initial EMS Education

At all levels of initial EMS education, curriculum and program length needs to be designed to demonstrate expected competencies and outcomes for program completion. Content must meet national standards and be influenced by evidence-based research and advances in clinical sciences related to EMS medicine and advancing technology. There are shared interests in maintaining balance between accessibility and affordability with educational requirements and barriers to entering the EMS workforce. Initial EMS educational programs have a vital role in developing an inclusive EMS workforce that is reflective of all communities and serves as a primary path for entering the profession.

Program Resources

To support learner success, programs need to have EMS educators formally prepared and capable of teaching the curriculum, informed on instructional techniques and methodologies, focused on developing the learner, and administering the program in all phases. More so, programs need to be equipped to educate the learner, train on required technical skills, and develop affective characteristics to deliver EMS care. Learners need to have access to learning resources and support available to them to ensure successful outcomes in their education. Programs need to establish

access to out-of-hospital and in-hospital patient care experiences that provide adequate opportunities to meet expected competencies and outcomes. A strong Advisory Committee comprised of local stakeholders should aid programs by providing input on local needs and supporting learning opportunities.

Single National Accreditor

Accreditation adds value and benefit to EMS educational programs and learners. As identified in previous seminal national EMS documents, there should be a single national accreditor for EMS education focused on the scope of practice and educational standards required to enter the profession. This national accreditation agency should be made up of a wide range of national stakeholders, serve as a resource, advocate for education programs, and focus on program outcomes and creditable education. All of these items are in addition to the added value from stakeholder participation and state leadership at the local program level.

Single National Certifying Organization

Consistent with previous seminal national EMS documents, our profession is best served by a single national certification organization with a process for assessing initial and continued competency of EMS candidates and practitioners. The certification organization should follow accepted high-stakes examination practices defined within the "Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing." This single national certification organization should have broad representation from professional stakeholders with a mission of protecting the public. Additionally, the single national certification organization should work closely and in partnership with industry stakeholders, including state EMS offices, local EMS and fire agencies, educational programs, medical directors, and others in carrying out its mission.

Academic Credit

If a learner receives academic credit for their EMS education, then awarded credits should be based on the rigor of the curriculum and time spent in completing expected competencies and outcomes. The number of credits awarded need to equitably account for both didactic and laboratory requirements along with patient care learning experiences. Patient care learning experiences encompass in-hospital settings, out-of-hospital settings, and capstone field internship with EMS agencies, where their ability to synthesize all elements of their education are demonstrated. Education programs need to review the number of credits awarded whenever there are changes to national EMS scope of practice, education standards, or expected competencies and outcomes.

Degree Completion

For EMS professionals promoting to management, leadership, and educational roles, there is added value in completing a college degree. Degree completion pathways are supported and should expand medical knowledge and/or professional capacities for EMS professionals wanting to further their knowledge and service.

Disagreement:

Entry-level Degree Requirement or Mandate

Any degree requirement or mandate for entry into the EMS profession or certification continues to raise concerns that cause pause. Concerns related to degree requirements often focus on the impact to the workforce pipeline, economics of such a decision, availability of degree options, sustainability of existing EMS educational programs, and if this would yield better providers. Included are concerns regarding the time to introduce any sort of degree requirement or mandate, as it took multiple years to successfully implement paramedic program director baccalaureate degree requirements. These concerns have merit with no clear path forward at this time.

Conclusion:
This position statement highlights common areas of agreement pertaining to EMS education and degrees. There are shared positions on the value of education, degree completion programs, and national oversight ensuring creditable education processes and certification. There are shared interests in keeping EMS education accessible and affordable as well as being inclusive and having a role in professional diversity. Much of this agreement seems to be overshadowed by the discussions on an entry-level degree requirement or mandate. We must continue to respect opposing views and appreciate concerns being raised. Additional research, dialogue, and increased collaborative understanding is welcomed.