

PARAMEDIC JOBS AND CAREERS: PARAMEDIC JOB DESCRIPTION

Are you familiar with the people running the stretchers through the door and shouting numbers at the doctors on the television show "ER"? Those are paramedics, also known as Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs). EMTs are the first medical people at the scene of an accident or sudden illness; they give immediate care to heart attack victims, car crash victims, gunshot victims, and poisoning victims. They even assist in premature childbirths. The sick or injured are then transported to healthcare facilities in specially equipped emergency vehicles. On arrival at a medical center, the paramedics transfer the patient to emergency care and report their observations and treatment procedure to the attending physician.

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The guidelines or procedures followed by EMTs are directly related to their level of training. The EMT-Paramedic is at the upper rung of a three-level hierarchy. Paramedics administer sophisticated prehospital care. They are trained in the use of complex medical equipment, such as EKGs, and are capable of administering drugs both orally and intravenously. EMT-Intermediates have more advanced training than EMT-Basics who bandage wounds, stabilize blood pressure, assist heart attack victims, and treat accident victims for shock. All three levels of EMTs must be talked through care procedures in the event they are confronted with a difficult or complicated situation. Thus EMTs must maintain radio contact with a dispatcher and keep him apprised of the situation. Should the need arise, senior medical personnel will then take charge.

EMTs, like doctors, are involved in life and death situations, so their work can be richly rewarding, as when a child is born despite difficulties, or terribly sad, when, even after administering proper care, their patient dies. Conditions are tremendously stressful, hours long and irregular, and salaries low. Paramedics must be physically and emotionally strong enough to do back breaking and sometimes dangerous work. The paramedic never knows what ad hoc set of conditions will meet him or her on any given day, so emotional stability is at a premium. "It's a lot of stress and anxiety," says one EMT who has been on the job for three years. "But some days you go home feeling like you really made a difference and that's a real good feeling."

Paying Your Dues

Training to become an EMT is offered by police, fire, and health departments and in some hospitals. Some colleges and universities offer nondegree courses. Basic training to become a first level EMT requires 100 to 120 hours of classroom sessions plus ten hours of internship in a hospital emergency room. An additional thirty-five to fifty-five hours of instruction in patient assessment, intravenous fluids, antishock garments, and esophageal airways are required in intermediate training. Paramedics usually undergo between 750 and 2,000 hours of training. But the real training comes from experience.

Although registration is not generally required, it does enhance the possibility of advancement and employment opportunities. Once certified, the EMT must renew his registration every two years. To do this he must be active in the field and must meet a continuing education requirement. However, a paramedic seeking advancement must leave fieldwork if she is to move up to operations manager, administrative officer, or executive director of emergency services.

Associated Careers

Because of its high-stress environment, many paramedics leave the field suffering from burnout. A lack of advancement opportunities and low salaries ensure a high turnover in this profession. On the other hand, police, fire, and rescue squad departments of emergency services offer attractive salaries and benefits. For paramedics looking to switch careers, the health care profession is an open door. With a rapidly aging population and scientific breakthroughs which prolong life, the proliferation of residential retirement communities, nursing homes, adult daycare centers, and health care agencies, the need for health care professionals is virtually assured. With more schooling, paramedics can become R.N.s, occupational and physical therapists, doctors, and other health care workers. Closer to the field, paramedics can make the transition to EMT instructor, dispatcher, law enforcement, or fire fighter.

Past And Future

Doctors saving soldiers on battlefields are the forerunners of today's paramedics. Unfortunately, there will always be a need for people who can administer emergency treatment and rush the sick and injured to doctors' care. Employment opportunities in the emergency services industry will continue to expand with an aging population which will increasingly have a need for such services.

Quality of Life

Two Years Out

If the paramedic is already board certified, the two-year mark signals the time for recertification. Continuing education classes are an integral part of the paramedic's first two years on the job. On-the-job training has given him the confidence and ability to deal with a variety of situations. The paramedic is relatively new to the field and still approaches his job with energy and idealism.

Five Years Out

The registered paramedic is still updating his skills through classes and workshops. After five years, she is beginning to feel the stresses of her job. Long and irregular hours, being on-call sometimes twenty-four hours a day are taking its toll on the professional. For those who are still stress-free at the five-year level, advancement figures prominently in their thoughts. Dispatcher, operations manager, or administrative director are positions that the five-year veteran would consider moving up to. This is also the ideal time to consider pursuing further studies in order to become an R.N., physician, or other health care professional.

Ten Years Out

The ten-year paramedic is usually no longer in the field. He is now in a middle- or top-level administrative position. Even with ten years of experience, continuing education classes and refresher courses are still important.

Professional Profile

# of people in profession:	120,000
% male:	75
% female:	25
average hours per week:	55

Professionals Read

EMT Update

Trama Care

Books, Films and TV Shows Featuring the Profession

ER

Rescue 911

Emergency

Seventy-Two On

Major Employers

Paramedics are employed by local government agencies. Contact the paramedic department in your area for employment information.

You'll Have Contact With

Doctors

Firefighters

Nurses

Police Officers

Major Associations

National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians
120 West Leake Street
Clinton, MS 39056
Tel: 800-346-2368

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