

Saturday, April 25, 2015

To the Honorable _____,

I am writing to you today to request your support in passing House Bill (HB) 2020. This bill serves to allow Texas Paramedics, certified and/or licensed, to work to their full scope of practice within an Emergency Department or Urgent Care, whether it is attached to a hospital, or a freestanding facility.

Recently, a nursing advocacy group, the Texas Emergency Nurses Association, has sanctioned an unprovoked attack on the credibility of EMS providers, and more specifically, Paramedics. I desire to allay any fears these unsubstantiated attacks may have brought on. The letter was drafted without any scientific or statistical facts to support it. I believe this letter is a scare tactic to protect a perceived domain threat in healthcare, and it isn't based upon what is in the best interest of patient care and its subsequent expenses. Paramedics are medical professionals with a very specific education in emergency medicine that makes them particularly suited to working in ED's and Urgent Care centers, not just to prehospital environments like ambulances.

The fact is that neither nurses nor Paramedics are subordinate to each other. We have completely separate regulatory boards, licenses, disciplinary and accountability committees, laws and administrative codes, and we both operate under the auspices of physicians that provide our patient care orders. We are licensed and/or certified in our own rights. Both of our great healthcare fields have a history of ever-evolving educational and competency requirements. In Texas, continuing education in Emergency Medical Services (EMS) to maintain competency and advance with modern medicine are taken very seriously. Paramedics are required to complete 36 hours per year of continuing medical education, whereas nurses are only required to complete 10 hours per year. In Texas, to obtain Paramedic licensure requires either an Associate's degree in EMS, a Baccalaureate degree, or a post-graduate degree, and certification requires graduation from an accredited Paramedic program. A Registered Nurse is now required to complete an Associate's degree nursing program at a minimum.

In the event you weren't aware of what it takes to become a Paramedic, I offer you an informative attachment on what it takes to become a Paramedic in Texas. It is a lengthy endeavor, focused specifically on emergency medicine and its many methods of delivery. It is now typical for a Paramedic's education to span over two years, just as it is for a Registered Nurse. I might point out that nursing underwent this very same advancement model in professionalism within the last few years.

In conclusion, I wish to thank you for allowing me to voice my support of HB 2020 and to encourage you to pass this important legislation that would allow Paramedics in Texas to staff ED's and Urgent Care centers, while practicing to the full extent of their certification and licensure. I'm sure that knowing how well qualified a Paramedic is to fill a patient care role in these environments will allow you to rest assured that passing this important bill can only be a benefit to Texas, her citizens, and honored guests. If you have any questions or concerns, or desire more justification in support of this measure, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Warmest regards,

What does it take to become a Paramedic in Texas?

To become a Paramedic, after obtaining an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) certification, which equates to a required 120 hour minimum advanced first aid program, one must endure several hundred hours of a very diverse series of topics in emergency medicine in an accredited Paramedic program, as non-accredited program attendees are no longer eligible to sit for national certification boards. Upon completion of the didactic phase of training, an intern in hospitals (usually under the tutelage of a Registered Nurse) for 120 hours is required. A third phase of training requires the Paramedic candidate to intern on a field EMS unit for several hundred more hours under the supervision of experienced Paramedics and their clinical operations administration and physician medical director.

After competence has been signed off by certified post-secondary EMS instructors, internship preceptors (again, usually Registered Nurses), and the program's physician medical director, the candidate is eligible to sit for the Paramedic exam from the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians (NREMT). After successful completion of both written and practical skills demonstrations examinations, the Paramedic candidate is awarded national certification and is then eligible to apply to the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) for certification and/or licensure.

After initial certification and/or licensure, the Paramedic enters a four-year recertification/licensure cycle. In that time, they must complete 144 hours of continuing medical education at or above their current level of certification/licensure. This may include physician-level continuing medical education courses. This number of hours is in contrast to the Texas Board of Nursing, which requires only 20 hours of continuing nursing education (CNE) for every two-year licensure cycle. The Texas Board of Medicine requires physicians to obtain 48 hours of continuing medical education every two-year licensure cycle. Paramedics are required to maintain current certification in Basic Life Support for Healthcare Providers (BLS-HCP, or current healthcare-level CPR certification) and also Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS – which is not required for nursing or physician licensure). If a Paramedic desires to maintain his national Paramedic certification through the NREMT, then he must submit 72 hours of continuing medical education every two-year recertification cycle.

Prerequisites to entrance to an accredited Paramedic program are left to the program administration, but core requirements are governed by the accrediting body, and as nearly all Paramedic programs are collegiate-based, degrees are very common for new program graduates. Paramedic program accreditation is earned through the Committee on Accreditation of Educational Programs for the Emergency Medical Services Professions (www.coaemsp.org).

For more information, please visit the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) website for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and Trauma Systems at <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/emstraumasystems/default.shtm>

For more information on the federal government's minimum national standard for Paramedic education, please visit the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA) EMS Educational Standards webpage at <http://www.ems.gov/EducationStandards.htm>, and view the 385-page educational standards outline for Paramedic at <http://www.ems.gov/pdf/811077e.pdf>.