

The Role of Paramedics in the Emergency Department

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Introduction

Paramedics are generally known for their role in emergency medical services outside the hospital. In response to healthcare system overcrowding, and increased demands on emergency departments, roles for paramedics have emerged in hospitals, both in Canada and internationally. While paramedics are becoming more commonplace in the ED, very little has been published on their role. In this qualitative study, we describe the role of department paramedics at the Charles V Keating Emergency and Trauma centre.

Methods

In this phenomenological study we interviewed six paramedics employed at the Charles V. Keating Emergency and Trauma Center. Interviews were semi-structured, and lasted about 15-20 minutes. Interviews were analyzed using thematic content analysis.

Results

Participants have described the role of the department paramedic as one that is broad in scope and flexible in nature. Their involvement in patient care includes resuscitations, being part of the trauma team and code team; critical care transport, airway management, and procedural sedations. This diverse scope of practice allows them to work where there is most need within the department, ultimately improving department flow. Performing procedural sedations is an important part of the role and is perhaps where paramedics have had their greatest impact within the department.

Conclusion

This study describes a well-established paramedic role in the ED of a busy regional referral center. Preliminary analysis has identified the successes of the department paramedic program, as well as the challenges associated with implementing such a program. This study should be useful to hospital administrators who are considering adding paramedics to their ED healthcare team.