

Brian Litza, EMT-Paramedic



The National EMS Scope of Practice

In my last column I wrote about the Wisconsin Ambulance Run Data System (WARDS) and the now current requirement for compliance. This time around I think it would be valuable to speak about a federal initiative that will be affecting our state in the very near future.

You may remember in my very first article I encouraged everyone to become involved in changes to Wisconsin EMS. I am now sounding a call to action to help us respond to a federal initiative that is the National EMS Scope of Practice. This was finalized last year and has become more significant than originally thought. You can find the document at www.soundrock.com/sop/. When it first came out, the state office, EMS Advisory Board, and Physician Advisory Committee (PAC) decided that our state was already outside the national scope and we would not be adopting the standard.

Since the deployment of this document there have been many discussions nationally about what it really says and how it can truly be a model for every state. In the last few months there has been a lot of buzz because the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians (NREMT) has climbed on board with its adoption. The reason is clear; they are the recognized national certifying agency and as such must be “in tune” with the national trends. However the national scope of practice issue is strongly tied to a parallel initiative that is the National EMS Educational Standards (<http://www.nemsed.org/>).

This program is the replacement for the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) standard curricula. Recently, NHTSA realized that they should not be in the curriculum business because educators are the experts and as such they can respond to the industry changes quicker and more appropriately than the government. So they have given the bulk of the development responsibility

to the National Association of EMS Educators (NAEMSE). They have been asked to be the lead agency in the development of the educational standards that will apply to all future EMS curricula. There will no longer be a national standard curriculum, but rather standards that will be a minimum for adoption into all EMS curriculums. All of these changes are based on the recommendations from Institute of Medicine of the National Academies report, *The Future of Emergency Care in the United States Health System* (www.iom.edu/CMS/3809/16107.aspx).

Now that we have an overview of the issues, let's see how they will affect us in Wisconsin. There are three questions that need to be answered. First, how will Wisconsin conform to the national scope? Second, how will this affect the licensing requirements since the National Registry is our examining body? Third and finally, how will the education standards affect education and curriculum in our state? To begin, you may be familiar with the National Incident Management System (NIMS), which has required many of us to become compliant with ICS 100, 300, and 700 (just to name a few). See the September-October 2007 issue of *EMS Professionals* for an overview. It has become a federal grant requirement that entities are NIMS compliant in order to be eligible to receive funding. The National EMS Scope of Practice appears to be headed in the same direction. In the name of interoperability, there seems to be a move to assure that if an EMT from one state is sent to another that the assumption will be that they will perform to the national scope. Since Wisconsin is providing care above and outside the national scope, this could be a potential problem. This does not even start to consider that our naming conventions are different than the ones proposed. The national scope identifies the following levels: Emergency Medical Responder (EMR), Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), Advanced Emergency

Medical Technician (AEMT), and Paramedic. As a quick comparison of levels, the scope of our current first responder is equal to the EMT, our Intermediate Technician compares to the AEMT, and our Intermediate equates to the Paramedic. This begs the question of how we will conform to three levels while keeping our four. Or will we?

How will Wisconsin conform to the national scope? It seems that the best direction for our state is to accept the national scope names. This will provide for the standardization and interoperability that is being sought and allows us to still be eligible for federal dollars. However, that does not preclude us from having a fourth level of provider. The timing of these issues is perfect because we are currently in rule revision and we can easily facilitate a change.

As another possibility we could just use the three levels identified and remove or freeze one of our other license levels. This would most likely be reflected in the Intermediate level. If we take the current Intermediate and Intermediate Technician we could develop an intermediate level that would combine these two scopes and both fit the needs of our state as well as conform to the national scope. Those at the intermediate level would either be allowed to continue at that level indefinitely or be subject to a five or ten-year transition period. All of these are discussions that will need to take place before a final decision is reached.

How will this affect the licensing requirements since the National Registry is our examining body? One of the underlying concerns for adoption will be state licensing exams. The NREMT is adopting the national scope and therefore will change their levels and licensing exams to reflect both the national scope and educational standards. If we remain outside the national scope, our people may not be eligible for examination through the NREMT and return us back to

providing state exams. This could prove to be very costly and time consuming since we would need to develop and validate our own exams along the same timeline that the NREMT is planning. If we accept the national levels, the NREMT could continue to be our examination body and anything outside the national scope could be tested as part of the course final exam or additions to the national registry examination process. Again, these are discussions that need to take place.

Finally, how will the education standards affect education and curriculum in our state? This is the question that is of most concern to educators and regulators alike. The education standards will probably be accepted and approved by NHTSA in fall of 2010. The educators and book publishers need this document finalized to be able to meet the demands of the industry. This also puts us in a holding pattern for our curriculum revisions. However, since we already know our scopes exceed the national scope we do not think that our work should stop. Regardless of how things work out we will have a scope that will always exceed the national standards and we should proceed with revisions keeping in mind the implications of the national education standards and their effect on scope of practice.

The purpose of sharing this information is truly to keep everyone informed of those things that are affecting us in Wisconsin. The time is now for all to voice your opinions on these issues. Yes, the EMS office is here to act in the best interest of the citizens and visitors to our state. It is also here to help develop a model EMS system for us to practice and meet the needs of our patients. The EMS Board is here to be the conduit for recommendations from the EMS community to the state office and assist us in making the right decisions. I encourage all of you to contact members of the board to voice your opinion on these issues. You can find their e-mail addresses at our website at <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/ems>. Remember, this is your EMS system and you have a voice as to how it develops. Remember, it is all about our patients! ♻️

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