

Brian Litza, EMT-Paramedic



### Following Your Scope Of Practice

Changes seem to constantly occur within EMS. Because of this, I have decided to cover two topics that are both important and sometimes easily forgotten. These items are the scope of practice and license renewal. In January 2006, *EMS Professionals* published an in-depth review of the scope of practice. A copy of this article, along with all of the charts and graphs, is available at [www.WisconsinEMS.com](http://www.WisconsinEMS.com) in the Members' Section. It is therefore not my intent to review this topic in depth.

Can an EMT-Basic use CPAP? Can an EMT-Intermediate administer Fentanyl? Can a Paramedic place a central line? These are some of the questions that are asked of our office on a regular basis. The answers can be found in a document that was developed several years ago called the scope of practice. The scope of practice documents were written to help identify the skills and medications that a provider may use. It is the basis for EMS practice and patient care in our state. Why is this important? Everyone works within the rules that are set forth. Sometimes it is difficult to know where the lines are drawn. The scope outlines the specifics of operating within a certain level of provider.

The reason I bring this up is that many services and individual providers are really unaware of what their scope of practice states. We are sure that several services are operating outside these parameters. The medications or skills may have been authorized prior to the scope documents so they are no longer allowed under the new requirements. The real message I would like to share is to have everyone look at the scope of practice documents for your level and confirm that you are functioning within them. If you find something outside the practice level, make an effort to correct the deviation. You may find the documents on our web site at: [http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/ems/system/scope\\_of\\_practice.htm](http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/ems/system/scope_of_practice.htm).

Another topic of concern has been continuing education for EMS providers. I have had many conversations regarding the necessity of continuing education for EMS providers. We are often compared to nurses and physicians who do not have continuing education requirements to

renew their licenses. This is not necessarily a true statement nor a direct comparison. Whereas these professionals have been around for hundreds of years, we have only been around for about 40 years. In addition, these professionals are required to have CE's if they are fellows or board certified. Furthermore, the employers take the initiative to verify competencies and provide necessary training. To further the discussion, you will find that all of these healthcare providers work within facilities that have numerous other people available should they need assistance or guidance. As you are aware, those of us in EMS are solitary providers. We operate very autonomously from our medical direction. This freedom that we enjoy comes with a price, and that is continuing education. It is the method by which we assure that everyone is up to date and operating within the current guidelines.

It's been a year since everyone renewed their EMT or First Responder license. By rule, we are required to renew before June 30 every two years on the even numbered year. You are probably wondering why I am discussing this now. After all, we have another year until it's renewal time again. The answer is simple: Many EMTs wait until the last minute to obtain the required training. A common saying is "those that fail to plan, plan to fail." This is your halftime pep talk to encourage everyone to see where they are, and plan to get their refresher training sooner rather than later. Every year following the renewal, we are inundated with many requests for late renewals because people did not have time to do their refresher. In our busy lives we can easily put off these activities until we are soon finding ourselves staring at the deadline, without the training, and ultimately without a license.

I will start with some of the most important providers, the medical first responder. As a first responder, you are required to complete a 24-hour refresher course. This must be completed through an authorized training center. Advanced skills can be done through the refresher, or if not offered, through your service medical director. Regardless, there must be a verification of competency for the advanced skills. In addition you must show current CPR certification.

An EMT-Basic has to complete a 30-hour refresher course. This must be a formal course completed through an authorized training center. It needs to include weapons of mass destruction information. In addition, don't forget to have that CPR card renewed. If it expires at any time, your license is not valid until your CPR is renewed. This is true at all levels.

If you are an Intermediate Technician, you are also required to obtain a formal basic refresher and an additional 12 hours of Intermediate Technician content. These additional hours can be through a formal refresher course or medical director authorized content / activities, and don't forget that CPR card. If you are an Intermediate or Paramedic, there are 48 hours of continuing education that must be completed. This can be a formal intermediate or paramedic refresher, or authorized content / activities as approved by your service medical director. These two advanced providers must also hold current CPR and ACLS.

As a side note, the EMS advisory board in cooperation with the training centers and service providers are looking into the possibility of changing the requirements at the EMT basic level. The suggestion is to allow this level provider the same flexibility that the advanced levels enjoy. There is a pilot study being conducted that will review several different types and styles of educational programs. It is the hope that EMT-Basics will have more flexibility in the future to tailor their refresher training to their personal needs. We should have some better information by this time next year.

We want all providers to retain their license and work within their appropriate scope of practice. They are in place to protect everyone, including the citizens and visitors of the state of Wisconsin. Yes, it's still about the patients. ♻️

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