



## **Scope of Practice for Paramedic Professionals**

### **Introduction**

A paramedic is a self-regulated health care professional who possesses the skills and knowledge to respond to all types of routine health care as well as medical and trauma emergencies in both out-of-hospital and in health care facilities. They are an integral part of health care teams; delivering their service to the public. A paramedic working or volunteering in Saskatchewan must be registered as a member with the Saskatchewan College of Paramedics (SCoP) as paramedic is a protected title. The scope of practice of licensed paramedics means the range of activities that members of that profession are educated and legally authorized to provide.

### **Overview of the Paramedic Profession in Saskatchewan**

Paramedics in Saskatchewan work principally with patients, families and communities in primary health care, acute care and critical care settings that include both out-of-hospital and in health care facilities, in the community, in patient homes, in fire services, in industrial and sports settings and in private practice. Recent (2009) Emergency Medical Services and Patient First Reviews in Saskatchewan proposed stronger integration of paramedics at all levels with the primary health care team and the implementation of mobile health services.

Paramedics respond 24 hours of the day, 365 days of the year to assist individuals, families and groups to meet their health care needs often in an emergency or crisis, but also in providing transport of patients or more routine care as part of a team of health care professionals. Paramedic work often involves assisting people whose capacity is impaired from a range of disabilities or health-related problems and may sometimes be called on to act for or on behalf of the patient.

Paramedics provide care which is patient-centred and focused on prevention, preserving life, promoting recovery and preventing deterioration of the patient's condition. Ideally, the paramedic provides early intervention which transitions seamlessly into the receiving health care team's (or physician's) treatment plan. Given the diversity of health care situations encountered and the complex nature of out-of-hospital care, paramedics must be skilled and knowledgeable in a range of subjects. They must be capable of taking charge of an emergency scene, ensuring scene safety and prioritizing patient care where there are multiple casualties and working closely with other emergency responders such as the police and fire services. Paramedics must be able to assess, manage and evaluate an individual's needs taking into account the current physical, psychological, environmental, cultural and social factors that influence the individual's functional ability. Given the complex range of problems which individual patients may present and the variety of settings, paramedics need to make informed professional judgments and work with patients to find practical solutions to any patient problems.

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Paramedics work independently and as members of health care and emergency service teams of professionals, often in situations where the team members are not physically located together. Paramedics can be autonomous and are responsible for the quality of care they provide for their patients. Patients usually seek direct care without referral from another health care professional, i.e. paramedics are able to act as first contact practitioners. However, patients do retain the right to refuse service or treatments being offered by a paramedic.

As members of a self-regulating profession privileged to be granted self-regulation, paramedics have accepted legal and ethical responsibility for their individual work and behaviour and hold the interest of the public and society as paramount. Individual members are accountable for the currency of their unique knowledge and skills which is met through their continued professional development as set and required by their representative members elected and appointed to the committees and Council of SCoP. These are responsibilities of the profession regardless of whether the paramedic's work is paid or volunteer.

In summary, paramedic practice encompasses the following:

- All ages and the full span of human development from neonate to old age;
- Working with individuals who present with complex and challenging problems resulting from multi-pathology and associated with the full range of socio-economic and cultural diversity of society;
- Independent assessment, management, implementation and evaluation of treatment interventions;
- Scene control and triage in multi-casualty situations;
- Health promotion and injury prevention; and
- Working in a broad range of settings including the patient's home, acute, primary and critical health care settings, community and industrial settings and fire services.

## **Paramedic Professional Licensure Levels**

There are currently four paramedic licence levels in Saskatchewan and the *Regulatory Bylaws* allow for the term paramedic to be used to describe the profession as a whole or to describe any practising member of the college, regardless of their licence level. The scope of practice and competency for each of these levels is currently set by considering the educational preparation, the National Occupational Competencies Profile (NOCP) and clinical experience of the paramedic. While all paramedic professionals share some of the same basic competencies, there are fundamental differences in the knowledge, skills and responsibility that each level incorporates. Movement up a level is progressive in that the knowledge and skills of one incorporate and build further upon the knowledge and skills of another. Scope of practice and the need for critical thinking expands accordingly as education, competence and experience increases. Although scope of practice remains within the limits noted throughout this document, there is flexibility to increase the scope of any level of paramedic if appropriate evidence can be shown that it is in the public interest.

### ***Emergency Medical Responder (EMR)***

An EMR has successfully completed an approved training program that meets the NOCP standards for EMRs. An EMR license is the entry point to be licensed as a paramedic as it has the least educational requirements. They are responsible for basic life support procedures, monitoring of minimal advanced life support procedures and are limited to administering basic life support medications.

### ***Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) / Primary Care Paramedic (PCP)***

An EMT/PCP has successfully completed a Canadian Medical Association (CMA) accredited EMT or PCP applied certificate program or a program that has been determined to be the equivalent. EMT/PCPs are the largest group of paramedic professionals in Saskatchewan and a license at this level is a mid-point of licensure as a paramedic. They are also responsible for basic life support procedures, but have increased ability to assist, monitor and perform advanced life support skills and an increased ability to administer medications.

### ***Emergency Medical Technician Advanced (EMT-A) / Intermediate Care Paramedic (ICP)***

An EMT-A/ICP has successfully completed an approved EMT-A or ICP applied certificate program. An EMT-A/ICP is a unique license level to Saskatchewan and is another mid-point of licensure as a paramedic. They are responsible for basic life support procedures, have an increased ability to assist, monitor and perform advanced life support skills and an increased ability to administer medications as compared to the EMT/PCP licensure level.

### ***Emergency Medical Technician – Paramedic (EMT-P) / Advanced Care Paramedic (ACP)***

An EMT-P/ACP has successfully completed a CMA accredited EMT-P or ACP diploma program or a program that has been determined to be the equivalent. At this time, an EMT-P/ACP licence is the highest license level that can be achieved in Saskatchewan with the most educational requirements that builds upon education received as an EMT/PCP or an EMT-A/ICP. They again can offer basic life support but also can deliver the widest range of advanced life support skills and administration of medications currently allowed for paramedics in Saskatchewan.

## **Regulatory Framework**

### ***Scope of Practice***

Scope of practice of paramedics in Saskatchewan is set by the SCoP and the Minister of Health, through *The Paramedics Act*, the *Regulatory Bylaws* pursuant to *The Paramedics Act*, related policies as well as the Saskatchewan Emergency Treatment Protocols that have been approved by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. These documents set the standards, limits and conditions on the professional activities of SCoP members.

It is also relevant to note that the scope of practice of the individual paramedic can be narrower than that of the scope of the paramedic profession as a whole. Individual scope of practice is influenced and often constrained by additional circumstances such as the practice site, equipment availability, assigned authority, requirements of the patient as well as each paramedic's education and experience, both professional and personal. The individual scope of practice is dynamic and will

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expand as the paramedic progresses along the foundation to expert learning continuum as competencies are mastered. However, it cannot expand beyond the scope of practice of paramedic profession as a whole.

### ***Self-Regulation***

Self-regulation is a privilege and a responsibility granted to the paramedic profession by government in the province of Saskatchewan. SCoP is given the authority to regulate the practice of the profession and govern its members with the primary mandate being protection of the public. Profession led regulation acknowledges that a profession itself is in the best position to determine standards or education and practice and to ensure that these standards are met.

### ***Entry Level Competence***

Educational programs are fundamental to the preparation of all paramedic professionals. Approved educational requirements are established in the *Regulatory Bylaws* and are expected to provide the appropriate entry competencies for each licensure level. While each license level might overlap in some basic competencies, there are again fundamental differences in focus, core content, length of program and in depth and breadth of study. The bylaws also require successful writing of an approved entry to practice licensing exam.

### ***Continuing Competence***

The *Regulatory Bylaws* establish a requirement for annual training, assessment, and continuing education in order for members to renew their licence to practice. Each year the College Council reviews and sets the requirements to be met by members. Each licensing level of paramedic has to meet requirements for mandatory skills assessments, mandatory certifications from internationally recognized standard setting agencies and continuing medical education credits. In the case of advanced life support providers, additional assessment of advanced skills is required every two years.

### ***Standards of Conduct***

Pursuant to the *Regulatory Bylaws*, each member is obligated to comply with the *Code of Professional Conduct*. The Code applies to all members regardless of whether their work is for pay or volunteer. The Code sets out the principles of ethical behavior for all members, the responsibilities to the patient and the responsibilities to the profession. The Code requires, in part, that members recognize their limitations and the skills of others in the care and treatment of the patient; provide patient care within their ability, seeking consultation where necessary; practice within the limitations defined in the member's scope of practice and assume responsibility for personal and professional development.