

Emergency Medical Technicians

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An automobile accident, a heart attack, a near drowning, a sudden childbirth, a poisoning, a gunshot wound—all of these situations demand urgent medical attention. Millions of Americans have seen medical emergencies like these handled on television programs. These shows have made many people aware of the crucial role played by emergency medical technicians (EMT's), sometimes called ambulance drivers or attendants.

A call from a dispatcher sends EMT's—they usually work in teams of two—to the scene of the emergency. Although speed is essential, the EMT's obey the traffic laws for the operation of emergency vehicles. They also must know the best route to take in the face of traffic and weather conditions.

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Upon arriving at the scene of the emergency, the driver parks the ambulance in a safe place to avoid accidents. If no police are present, bystanders may be enlisted to lend a hand. For instance, in the case of an automobile accident, bystanders can help control traffic by placing road flares, removing debris, and redirecting traffic.

EMT's first determine the nature and extent of the victims' illnesses or injuries and establish priorities for emergency medical care. Appropriate medical care is given to the patients, such as opening and maintaining an airway, restoring breathing, controlling bleeding, treating for shock, immobilizing fractures, bandaging, assisting in childbirth, managing mentally disturbed patients, and giving initial care to poison and burn victims.

Photograph courtesy of Bethesda-Chevy Chase Rescue Squad



Training given EMT's stresses efficiency and confidence, to reassure both patients and bystanders. While not wasting any time, EMT's avoid undue haste, trying to handle patients correctly. When the situation requires, as in the case of epileptics, diabetics, or other medical conditions, EMT's look for medical identification emblems that are clues to providing correct treatment.

In cases where persons are trapped, such as in an automobile accident, EMT's face a double problem. They must first assess the victims' injuries and supply all possible emergency care and protection to the trapped persons as well. They must then use the correct tools and techniques to remove the victims safely. When additional help or special rescue or utility services are needed, EMT's request them from a dispatcher by radio or telephone.

In case of death, EMT's notify the proper authorities and arrange for the protection of the deceased's property.

Often patients must be transported on stretchers. In such instances, EMT's place the patients on stretchers, lift them into the ambulance, and secure both the patients and the stretchers for the ride.

EMT's take their patients to the nearest hospital they consider best equipped to treat them. In order to assure prompt treatment upon arrival, EMT's report by radio directly to the hospital emergency room or the emergency dispatcher about the nature and extent of injuries, the number of persons being transported, and the destination. They may ask for additional advice from the hospital's emergency medical staff.

On the way to the emergency room, EMT's constantly watch the patients, giving additional care as needed or as directed by a physician with whom they have radio contact.

Upon arrival at the hospital, they help transfer the patients from the ambulance to the emergency room. They report their observations and care of the patients to the emergency room staff for diagnostic purposes and as a matter of record. If called upon, EMT's help the emergency room staff.

One of the duties of EMT's is to maintain a clean, well-equipped ambulance. After each run, EMT's replace the used linen, blankets, and other supplies, send the used items to be sterilized, and carefully check all equipment so that the ambulance is ready for the next trip.

If they have carried patients who have contagious infection or have been

exposed to radiation, the interior of the ambulance is decontaminated. EMT's make sure that the ambulance is in good operating condition by checking the gasoline, oil, tire pressure, lights, siren, heater, and communications equipment.

In 1975, an estimated 260,000 people—mostly men—worked as emergency medical technicians. About half of these were volunteers on rescue squads, the majority of which work closely with fire departments. Most women EMT's were volunteers.

Many paid EMT's work for police and fire departments and private ambulance companies. Funeral homes providing ambulance service employ a substantial number of EMT's, although in recent years many funeral homes have left this field. Some EMT's work on hospital-based ambulance squads.

Training, Qualifications, and Advancement. Few emergency medical technicians received formal training until recent years. Now the importance of instruction in emergency medical care techniques is stressed. A standard training course is the 81-hour program designed by the U.S. Department of Transportation. This program, or its equivalent, is available in all 50 States and the District of Columbia. It is offered by police, fire, and health departments, in hospitals, and as a special course in medical schools, colleges, and universities.

This course provides instruction and practice in dealing with such emergencies as bleeding, fractures, airway obstruction, cardiac arrest, and emergency childbirth. Students learn the care and use of common emergency equipment, such as backboards, suction machines, fracture kits, oxygen delivery systems, and stretchers. Physicians and nurses usually give the lectures and demonstrations.

There is also a short course dealing with the removal of trapped victims. Students may take this course, which lasts 2 days, only after completing the basic 81-hour program. Further training courses presently are being prepared by the Department of Transportation for the categories of EMT—Paramedic and EMT—Dispatcher. A special course on driving also is in preparation.

Admittance to an EMT training course requires that the applicant be at least 18 years old, have a high school diploma or the equivalent, and have a valid driver's license. Among the subjects recommended for high school students

interested in the field are driver education and health and science courses.

Graduates of approved EMT training programs who meet certain experience requirements and successfully pass a written and practical examination administered by the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians earn the title of Registered EMT-Ambulance. EMT's must register again every 2 years.

Although not a general requirement for employment, registration with the National Registry is acknowledgment of an EMT's qualifications and makes higher paying jobs easier to obtain. As of May 30, 1975, almost 34,000 EMT's were registered.

Emergency medical technicians should have good dexterity and physical coordination. They must be able to lift and carry up to 100 pounds. EMT's need good eyesight (eyeglasses may be used) with accurate color vision. Normal good health is expected.

Because EMT's often have to do their job under trying conditions, they must be able to exercise good judgment under stress and have leadership ability. Emotional stability and the ability to adapt to many different situations help them handle difficulties. They should have a neat and clean appearance and a pleasant personality.

Job Outlook. Employment of emergency medical technicians is expected to grow much faster than the average for all occupations, due to the increasing public awareness of the need for better emergency medical services. Since the passage by Congress of the Highway Safety Act of 1966 and the Emergency Medical Services System Act of 1974, the Federal Government has encouraged the expansion and improvement of ambulance services.

Numerous positions for full-time emergency medical technicians should open up as more and more communities change from volunteer to paid ambulance services. A trend is underway establishing ambulance service as the third essential service, after police and fire protection.

Increasing cooperation between ambulance personnel and the physicians and nurses of emergency rooms is expected to further contribute to the growth of the emergency medical technician occupation. In over 20 States, laws have been revised to allow EMT's to perform such duties as operating telemetry units—machines which send a patient's vital signs from the ambulance to the hospital—or working in

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emergency rooms between calls. A career ladder for the EMT field is being established, which will make the occupation more attractive to prospective EMT's. As the field of emergency medical care develops and personnel become more qualified, more people are expected to use ambulance services, thus increasing the demand for EMT's.

In addition to job opportunities created by growth, many openings for emergency medical technicians will occur each year because of the need to replace EMT's who transfer to other fields of work, retire, or die.

Earnings and Working Conditions.

Earnings of emergency medical technicians depend on the type of employer, training, and experience of the individual EMT and the geographic location.

In general, graduates of approved 81-hour training programs received starting salaries of between \$7,500 and \$9,000

annually in 1975, depending on the community. Emergency medical technicians working for police and fire departments usually are paid the same salaries as police officers and firefighters.

A few volunteer EMT's are paid a small amount for being on call or answering emergency calls, although most volunteers are not paid.

Emergency medical technicians employed by fire departments often have a 56-hour workweek. Emergency medical technicians employed by hospitals, private firms, and police departments usually work 40 hours a week. Volunteer EMT's have varied work schedules, but many put in from 8 to 12 hours a week. Because many ambulance services function 24 hours a day, emergency medical technicians often work nights and weekends.

The employee benefits offered by private companies, such as vacation, sick leave, and health insurance, vary widely. Emergency medical technicians employed

by hospitals and police and fire departments receive the same benefits as the other employees.

Additional Information. Information concerning training courses can be obtained by writing to the Emergency Medical Services Division of the Health Department of your State.

Information about job opportunities for prospective emergency medical technicians is available from:

Emergency Medical Services Branch
National Highway Traffic Safety
Administration
400 7th St. SW.
Washington, D.C. 20590.

Information about the registration of emergency medical technicians is available upon request from:

National Registry of Emergency
Medical Technicians
1395 East Dublin-Granville Rd.
P.O. Box 29233
Columbus, Ohio 43229.

Apprentices in the Military

Men and women will soon be able to receive apprenticeship training while serving in the Army and Navy. Army apprenticeship programs for operating engineers—the construction workers who drive bulldozers, lay roadbeds, mix concrete and asphalt, and repair heavy duty equipment—have already begun. The Army is also studying its training programs in many other specialties to see if the training is comparable with that of civilian apprenticeships. The Navy also plans to offer apprenticeships for some occupations.

This new program is expected to improve job prospects for veterans certified as apprentices and speed their advancement in civilian careers. In the past, employers and unions could not always give a veteran credit for military

training because detailed records of what had been learned were not available. Under the new program, everyone accepted as an apprentice will sign a formal apprenticeship agreement and receive a Work Experience Log Book. The log book, which is similar to those kept by civilian apprentices, shows how much on-the-job and classroom instruction the apprentice has had in the various skills of the craft.

Since veterans will take their log book with them, they can leave the service before finishing an apprenticeship and still retain credit for training completed. A clear statement of work experience affects a civilian's starting salary because an apprentice's wages increase with each 6 months of training completed.

To become apprentices, men and women must be on active duty, meet the physical and educational standards of the chosen occupation, and achieve acceptable scores on aptitude tests for that occupation. Soldiers need not join a union to be apprentices, although unions, employers, and the Department of Labor work together to set training standards. The Department of Labor's Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training will issue a nationally recognized Certificate of Apprenticeship Completion to everyone who finishes training.

Local Army recruiters have more information about apprenticeships in the Army. Navy recruiters will soon have information about apprenticeships for sailors.