

A Comparison of European
Emergency Medical Services
and the Possibility of Implementing
a Standardized Training Curriculum
for a Future European Paramedic Profession

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Abstract

Title

A Comparison of European Emergency Medical Services and the Possibility of Implementing a Standardized Training Curriculum for a Future European Paramedic Profession

Background

Emergency medical services are an integral part of any health system with a primary function to provide rapid medical assistance in life-threatening situations. Since the EU-Treaty strives towards equal living conditions as a goal throughout Europe, this implies that every citizen of the European Union can expect to be provided with the same high level of care from pre-hospital emergency medical services.

Aim and Objectives

Even though the European Union (EU) has been promising professional freedom of movement across European borders for many years, in practice several problems for ambulance professionals occur: One being the many different existing emergency medical services; another, the different professional qualifications and existing curricula in cross-border professional practice. The aim of this thesis is to assess the possibility of a standardized training curriculum of a European paramedic profession¹. In order to achieve this aim, this research describes the characteristics of the existing European EMS and investigates the types and qualifications of the individual pre-hospital emergency care personnel. The analysis is conducted from the perspective of the Federal Republic of Germany and provides a sound scientific basis.

By comparing how different European EMS systems work, an attempt is made to identify the best training and education practices possible for paramedic professionals. Subsequently this research attempts to answer the question, whether it appears feasible and necessary to implement a standardized training curriculum for a paramedic profession that is recognized throughout Europe. Opportunities and initial ideas towards the development of a potential future curriculum are created.

Methodology

This thesis outlines the historical development of emergency medical services (EMS), while specifically illustrating the formation of the emergency medical system of the Federal Republic of Germany. Subsequently two strands of data collection aim towards gathering data on the various EMS systems throughout Europe. In a first step an integrative literature review is conducted and relevant publications on the training, education and on-going professional development of EMS staff identified. These are analyzed according to their orientation towards a standardized European curriculum. In a second step a comprehensive cross-sectional survey of the specific paramedic

¹ To describe the different EMS systems a uniform nomenclature was necessary, which is reflected for example in the use of the term 'paramedic', which in Europe is in some cases a nationally protected occupational title. Due to the fact that the different European countries have different job titles for their emergency medical service professions, the term 'paramedic' is used comprehensively. The use of the term 'paramedic' in this thesis shall not implement any judgment or preference of a specific systems or job title. It is simply used as a standardized professional title for the highest qualified profession of any pre-hospital emergency medical service. If country-specific emergency medical services are explained, the commonly used professional country title may be used synonymously to the term paramedic.

profession of each EU country is undertaken and a specially developed questionnaire submitted to the most important EMS stakeholders in all European countries.

Both strands of data collection are systematically evaluated according to predefined criteria. This detailed catalog of criteria allowed identifying similarities and differences of all European EMS systems and the broad spectrum of existing curricula and training approaches directed towards EMS personnel.

Findings

The research results of this thesis show that the emergency medical services in most European countries are modern, efficient and structured in a comparable way. However, hardly any efforts of adaption or mutual recognition beyond state borders can be found. In some cases the training curricula of emergency staff even varies within single EU countries. One of the main reasons for this fragmentation is the historical development of the emergency medical services (EMS) within the different EU countries. The varying histories of each European country and region lead to a patchwork of definitions, laws and different schemes of EMS. It turned out that the biggest differences concern the operational EMS staff and their education and training, although they all have to manage similar types of medical emergencies and perform the same emergency procedures.

Conclusions

Evidence is gathered to answer the research question, what kind of definition of profession and curricula exist and whether these may subsequently be unified to form a basis for a future European curriculum for paramedics. A dynamic development of proven principles and structures within the EU is worked towards. This European harmonization - not equalization - in EMS training and education appears to be necessary and recommendations toward such a future European paramedic profession are given. Based on the results of this research, the idea of creating a 'European Pre-Hospital Emergency Medical Working Group' is put forward. Such a formally establish working group could contribute to strengthening and harmonizing pre-hospital emergency medical care in Europe.

With regard to the long-standing demand for unification and recognition of cross-border vocational skills of the different professions within the European health workforce, ultimately this research project makes a significant contribution by providing a comprehensive starting point and the opportunity for all individual European countries to develop and agree on a common European paramedic curriculum.