Reading: English for EMT's 1

The importance of EMT's and Paramedics

Whether it be an ambulance rushing through the downtown traffic or a fire truck screaming along the highway, or a rescue chopper soaring over the mountains - we all know that there are people in trouble and the brave EMT's and paramedics onboard these vehicles will do everything they can to save them.

But how many of you have considered what this actually involves? EMT's are often depicted on TV as the Macgyvers of the medical world able to cope in any situation, using only the limited selection of tools at their disposal, and while this is true it would be wrong to think that any of their activities are spontaneous or not thought-out. Each and every response is a testament to their training and knowledge.

At the time of a call out, it is impossible to predict the exact situation they will be walking into so all EMT's are trained to cope with the unexpected in a methodical and calm way. They may arrive on the scene of a highway accident in which multiple casualties are present, the EMTs may need to extricate patients from their vehicles and then prioritize the seriousness of each injury, to do this an LOC (level of consciousness) test is often used.

Once all casualties have been assessed and placed in a safe position, it is up to the EMT's to stabilize the patients through the most viable course of action. This stabilization which can be offered depends on whether it is provided by an EMT or a paramedic as the paramedic has had more extensive training and can even provide minor surgical interventions such as a nasogastric intubation, or use an AED (automated external defibrillator) something which an EMT basic is forbidden from doing. However, both the EMT basic and the paramedic are well trained in procedures to suppress bleeding or remediate breathing using ventilation. Both kinds of healthcare workers are also able to perform CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation).

Once the initial treatment has been given, the patient needs to be prepared for transport which in itself can be a challenge. Many patients who have been involved in accidents may have suspected damage to their spine so they need to be secured to a cot to prevent movement. If a patient appears jaundiced, it may be a sign that they could vomit during transport so it is important that their airways be kept clear. Fortunately, modern rigs contain a wide array of devices which can be used in both the treatment and movement of patients so EMTs onboard are well equipped.

Once the patient is en-route to the hospital, it is crucial that the EMT's apprise the hospital of what to expect so that the doctors and nurses on duty can be ready and waiting to continue the treatment. The driver of the ambulance has to balance the necessity for high speed with the need to make the ride as comfortable for the patient as possible.

As with everything in healthcare, paperwork is also generated by these runs with EMT's having to fill out a run-sheet each time they are called out on an emergency run with
basic information about the patient, the complaint and any action taken, and a face-sheet
each time a patient is taken to hospital showing that all relevant details have been
provided to the hospital.

And once all that is done, the day is still not over for the EMT as the ambulance needs to
be disinfected and any items used during the run need to be replaced.

As you can see, the life of an EMT is far from boring.

**Discussion Questions**

What are the main duties of EMTs?

What characteristics do you think are important for EMT's / paramedics?

How has modern technology helped EMTs?