An interview with an EMT about a recent call out

M: Hello and welcome to today’s episode of ‘A day in the life’, a series which looks at a typical daily routine of various professionals. My name’s Mark Brookes and our guest today is Francis Goodman, who works as an EMT at Stanford General Hospital. Welcome to the program, Frank.

F: Hello Mark, hello everybody.

M: First of all let me just say we are all very glad you accepted our invitation. To start off, could you tell our listeners a few words about yourself?

F: Certainly. I’m 32 and I’ve been working in A&E department for 11 years. I began my career as an EMT-B but after a few years I took a course to become an EMT - I.

M: In this program we talk to specialists in various fields and ask them to give us an overview of their typical day. So what is your typical day like, Frank?

F: That’s a tough question Mark, as in this line of work, there’s no such thing as a typical day. I can tell you about yesterday and this will give you insight in what me and my workmates do. Will this be OK?

M: Good idea Frank. So what was yesterday like? Were you called out to an emergency?

F: Yes, indeed we were, and this was actually a major event that you must have heard of, as it was on the news all the time.

M: Do you mean that dreadful pile-up on Interstate 10?

F: Yes, that’s right. It was about 10 in the morning and we were just hanging out in our base when the dispatcher instructed us to go immediately to the scene. Do you know what happened exactly?

M: Not really, I only heard there was one fatal casualty.

F: Yes, unfortunately the person suffered immediate death and we weren’t able to help him. What happened was that a SUV crashed into a truck transporting ammonia, which as you know is highly hazardous. As this happened near traffic lights, two more passenger vehicles then crashed into the SUV. The thick fog must have been the reason why they didn’t manage to brake in time.

M: That sounds terrifying.

F: Yes. The SUV driver was speeding at the time and he crashed into the truck so badly that the ammonia tank started leaking, causing burns to some victims as well as
M: So what did you do first after you arrived at the scene?

F: Well as usual we had to make an accurate assessment of the situation and as soon as we realized there had been an ammonia leakage, we informed the firefighting services. Then we identified who suffered injuries and took vital signs of the victims.

M: When taking vital signs, what exactly do you look at?

F: We first check LOC, which stands for level of consciousness, depending on whether the victim is unconscious or conscious and able to communicate. Then we examine breathing and take pulse, as well as look at pupils.

M: Pupils? You mean the part of the eye?

F: Exactly, the little black spots in our eyes. We check whether they are dilated or constricted, in other words, smaller or bigger, and how they react to light.

M: Oh yes, I understand. So what happened next?

F: With the assessment completed, we began to provide care to the victims. The sight was really terrifying due to the ammonia leakage and one of the members of our team was not able to maintain his composure. It was a new person and this came to him as quite a shock, so we told him to stay in the ambulance. We took care of those badly hurt in the first place. The most important thing was to control the bleeding and in one case, a paramedic had to perform an on-site blood transfusion. The next task we had to do was bandage injuries, and in case of those victims with fractures, splint the broken bones and immobilize the limbs.

M: Then I guess you gave the necessary medicine before setting off to the hospital?

F: Yes, but in order to do so, the paramedic had to calculate the dosage and then administer the recommended medicine. We EMTs are not allowed to do that. When the medicine was administered and the victims carried on board ambulances, we drove to the hospital.

M: Thanks you very much for telling us about the event, Frank. My impression is that your job can be both very rewarding and very traumatic at the same time, as on the one hand you help people and save lives, but on the other you witness so much sadness and pain.

F: I couldn’t agree more, Mark.
**Discussion Questions**

What are the most important duties of an EMT?

What vital signs can an EMT take after the arrival to the patient?

EMTs sometimes claim their work is underestimated. Why do you think it may be so?