Texas EMS Education Programs and COVID-19

April 22, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed delivery methods and learning opportunities for emergency medical services (EMS) educational programs. Schools are closed, and didactic instruction has moved to online delivery. Clinical and field internship sites are restricted, prohibiting entry of visitors including students. EMS agencies are restricting student internships. These changes require even greater flexibility for EMS educational programs to employ a wide variety of approaches, including simulation, in determining competency in didactic, laboratory, clinical, field experience, and field internship settings.

The Department of State Health Services (DSHS) understands that EMS education institutions, program directors, medical directors, faculty, and State EMS Providers are working diligently to find ways to continue the EMS education of students during this extraordinary time. DSHS, the Committee on Accreditation of Educational Programs for the Emergency Medical Services Professions, the National Register of Emergency Medical Technicians and members of Governor’s EMS Trauma Council Education Committee continue to research alternative pathways to assure excellence in education while maintaining compliance with EMS education standards and flexibility in credentialing of EMS professionals during the public health crisis.

Texas EMS Educational Programs may employ a broader array of approaches to determine competency. Through December 31, 2020, DSHS will permit the use of alternative evaluation methods to include scenarios, case studies and simulation as well as the adjustment of minimum competencies to satisfy the requirements of standards for Texas EMS educational programs.

The EMS Education Program medical director and program director OR course coordinator MUST ensure the entry-level competence of each graduate of the program in the cognitive and psychomotor domains. Any changes to program requirements must be documented in an Action Plan as follows and made available immediately to DSHS staff upon request:

- **Modifications to Minimum Patient/Skill Requirements.** If modifications are made to the program’s overall established minimum patient/skill requirements, documentation shall include:
  - Who was involved with the modification decision
  - Documentation of the change to the numbers, including
    - Evidence of approval of the program medical director and
    - Endorsement by the advisory committee.

- **Program’s Action Plan to Determine Student Competency.** The program’s action plan will explain how it determines that a student is entry-level competent. The action plan may vary by individual student based on their program lab, clinical, and field internship progress to date.

- **Student’s Individual Action Plan.** When a student is deemed entry-level competent, there must be documentation of the student’s progression of learning and achievement, including any final evaluations.

- **Program end date changes.** If the end date for the program changes, continue to complete the online Notification/Change form as you would normally do.
In accordance with the guidelines from the president and the CDC, schools shall remain temporarily closed to in-person classroom attendance by students. EMS educational teachers and staff are encouraged to continue to work remotely to provide video instruction, as well as perform administrative duties. In addition, programs shall follow local, state, or federal directives during this public health emergency.

By working together, we can ensure the quality of emergency care the residents of Texas expect in these challenging times!