A Brief Explanation of "Accreditation" and the Annual Report of Trends in Paramedic Education Grady Health System…

When one is ready to make an investment in higher education, it is important to consider all the institutions and programs on the market to select one(s) that have the best individual fit. In order to decide best fit, one must decide which parameters (location, size, reputation, cost, schedule, etc.) are most important. Once you find a program that meets all of your established parameters, you are ready to invest resources and appreciate the maximum in returns.

Accreditation

You should always verify that an institution of higher learning is accredited. Accreditation **IS NOT** a US Department of Education mandated process. Accreditation **IS** a voluntary process that institutions elect to go through in order to have an independent, non-biased agency evaluate institutional resources, policies, and outcomes. The accrediting body develops universal standards for quality and programs seeking accreditation must meet or exceed each standards in order to achieve accreditation.

Institutional Accreditation

Colleges and universities have two routes for achieving institutional accreditation. The national accreditation process is one by which institutions with a career focused curriculum are compared with other institutions with the same programs nation-wide. These institutions are often less expensive and have more relaxed enrollment criteria. Institutions with national accreditation may accept transfer credit from either regionally accredited or other nationally accredited institutions; however, credits earned at nationally accredited institutions do not transfer to regionally accredited institutions. Regional accreditation—often considered more prestigious—differs from national accreditation in that these institutions elect to be peer-reviewed by a regionally designated body (i.e. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges). Regionally accredited institutions tend to be non-profit and unlike nationally accredited institutions, they are eligible for federal grants and most corporate tuition reimbursement plans.

Programmatic Accreditation

Programmatic Accreditation is another type of accreditation focused on a particular program or school of study (i.e. paramedic, respiratory, nursing, education, business, law, etc.). Programmatic accreditation allows for institutions with the resources to facilitate specialized professional development to do so independently of colleges and universities. However, colleges and universities wishing to foster programs with specialized training must also achieve programmatic accreditation to do so.

Only certain organizations may sponsor a Paramedic Education Program. According to CAAHEP (p. 2, 2015), these organizations must *either award credit for the program or have an articulation agreement with an accredited post-secondary institution* and one of the following:

- Hospital, medical center, or clinic accredited by a healthcare accrediting agency or equivalent that is recognized by the US Department of Health and Human Services);
- post-secondary academic institutions (recognized by the US Department of Education),
- government education or medical service (authorized to provide those services by a state);
- Federal agencies or a branch of the US Armed Forces may have the resources to sponsor a paramedic education program.

If any of these organizations wish to sponsor a paramedic education program, each must complete an Initial Self-Study Report (ISSR) of resources and capabilities and transmit their findings to CoA EMSP (the Committee on Accreditation for the EMS Professions) for review. CoA EMSP reviews the ISSR and then provides subject-matter expertise for EMS Program site visitation and evaluation of compliance with nationally developed accreditation standards. If an EMS Program meets or exceeds these quality standards, CoA EMSP makes recommendation for accreditation to CAAHEP (the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs).

Today, all institutions with programs providing specialized education for Paramedics must achieve and maintain CAAHEP accreditation in order for their students to be eligible to challenge the National Registry Paramedic Certification Examinations. Once a paramedic program has achieved initial accreditation, it works with CoA EMSP to maintain accreditation. Organizations sponsoring programs must submit annual reports (2 years behind the calendar year to assure all annual graduate data is effectively collected in full) of programmatic outcomes and once every five (5) years, the organization must perform a Continued Self-Study Reports (CSSR). Submission of a CSSR then prompts another comprehensive programmatic review and site visitation facilitated by CoA EMSP and if a Paramedic Education Program meets or exceeds standards, CoA EMSP makes recommendation for continuing accreditation to CAAHEP.

Paramedic Education at Grady Health System
In 2011, Academy faculty and staff began working toward acquiring and documenting resources for sponsoring a Paramedic Program. By 2015, the Programmatic ISSR was submitted to CoA EMSP and formal instruction under the auspices of the CoA EMSP Letter of Review (LOR). In 2014, the Program hosted its first CoA EMSP site visitors at EMS Operations Headquarters and soon thereafter relocated the Paramedic Program (with the EMT and Advanced EMT Programs) to Grady EMS Education Academy at its current location on Marietta Boulevard.

In May of 2015, the Grady Paramedic Education Program achieved initial CAAHEP accreditation and immediately began work to maintain it. On January 16, 2020, the Paramedic Education Program at Grady EMS Education Academy achieved the status of "continuing" CAAHEP accreditation. As a condition for retaining CAAHEP accreditation, *current and consistent summary information about student/graduate achievement must be available to the public* (CAAHEP, pp. 9-10, 2015). A three-year summary of programmatic retention and pass rates, National Registry testing outcomes, and job placement rates for graduates of the Grady Paramedic Education Program is available for review below:

Paramedic Course Outcomes by Graduation Year	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Programmatic Retention Rate	77.78%	66.67%	57.14%	52.80%	50.00%	73.30%
Programmatic Pass Rate	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
NRP CBT[1] Pass Rate (1st attempt)	93.75%	100.00%	100.00%	78.00%	66.70%	71.00%
NRP CBT Pass Rate (by 3rd attempt)	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	96.00%
NRP PAT[2] Pass Rate (1st attempt)	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	95.80%
NRP PAT Pass Rate (by 3rd attempt)	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Positive Job Placement	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Table 1. Grady Paramedic Education Program Outcomes

State v. National Comparison Outcomes by Year	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Georgia NRP CBT Pass Rate (1st attempt)	68.00%	67.00%	70.00%	63.00%	69.00%
Georgia NRP CBT Pass Rate (3rd attempt)	78.00%	80.00%	83.00%	80.00%	85.00%
USA NRP CBT Pass Rate (1st attempt)	72.00%	69.00%	71.00%	73.00%	73.00%
USA NRP CBT Pass Rate (3rd attempt)	83.00%	85.00%	86.00%	87.00%	87.00%

Table 2. Comparative Outcomes for all Paramedic Education Programs in GA and in the USA

CBT[1] = Computer-Based Test

PAT[2] = Psychomotor (Skills) Assessment Test

References

CAAHEP. (2015). *Standards and Guidelines for the Accreditation of Educational Programs in the Emergency Medical Services Professions.* Retrieved 2020, from Commission on the Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs: https://www.caahep.org/CAAHEP/media/CAAHEP-Documents/EMSPStandards2015.pdf

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