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INVITED COMMENTARY

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Paramedic education: developing depth through networks and evidence-based research

Where from and where to?

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Produced on behalf of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, *Paramedic education: developing depth through networks and evidence-based research*, is a much needed study that reflects current tensions facing the paramedic profession, similar to one that was argued in nursing 20 years ago.

A collaboration between the nine Australian universities who currently offer paramedic undergraduate programmes, the project was set up to investigate international models of best practice for fostering the ideal working relationship between graduate paramedics, ambulance service providers, professional associations and universities, while meeting the educational needs of future paramedics in Australia.

Data presented in the report were collected from all states in Australia, and from interviews undertaken with key academics, industry leaders and paramedic unions from Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

The report reveals the diversity in the approach between universities and industry from vocational to post-graduate educational programmes. The differing approach of organisations to that of universities cumulates in the criticism of lack of road readiness of paramedic practitioners at the end of university programmes or ability and the lack of signature paramedic pedagogy within the profession.

The climate of the changing emphasis in healthcare provision from acute to chronic, and keeping patients out of hospital, is driven by policy change.¹ Alongside this comes the need

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for the provision of new roles for healthcare professionals including the role of the Emergency Care or Extended Paramedic Practitioner and Physician Assistant. This in turn puts pressure on universities and organisations to provide up skilling and increased knowledge of existing professionals in order for them to function effectively in these new roles. In the United Kingdom, the paramedic profession has struggled with this concept since 2003 in terms of standardisation of programmes and agreement on the competencies required, despite the publication of the Emergency Care Practitioner Competence and Curriculum Framework.²

The main arenas of uncertainty lie in the problem of producing a credible curriculum as no standardisation currently exists in the definition of ‘road readiness’ and much of the arguments focus around subject driven versus academic theory within the curriculum. Other uncertainties surround the age old argument about the gap between education and practice. However, the similarities are similar worldwide in that the ability to recruit paramedic lecturers is problematic which has resulted in a dearth of evidence or best practice within the paramedic profession.

Not unlike Australia, the United Kingdom is of the belief that the inter-professional perspective is central to collaboration between autonomous practitioners³ and has resulted in joint programmes for paramedics, nurse practitioners and physician assistants with positive outcomes for the paramedic profession.

The report is timely and provides an excellent overview of the existing state of play in Australia and other parts of the world regarding paramedic education. The next step will be in finding solutions for balancing the distinctive characteristics of the discipline and the challenge of meeting multidisciplinary pre-hospital care.

[Link to Executive Summary](#)

[Link to Full Report](#)

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