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Standard Practice for Training Instructor Qualification and Certification Eligibility of Emergency Medical Dispatchers¹

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INTRODUCTION

The emergency medical dispatcher (EMD) is the principal link between the public requesting emergency medical assistance and the emergency medical services (EMS) system. The EMD plays a key role in the ability of the EMS system to respond to a perceived medical emergency. The benefits of specifically trained emergency medical dispatchers are far reaching. Through medical dispatch, specific education, and compliance to medically sound policies and procedures, the EMD is able to accurately interrogate the caller, dispatch the appropriate responders, provide pertinent information to responders, and give instructions to aid patients via the caller.

This practice provides direction for the training and certification of emergency medical dispatchers to assist them in making appropriate decisions about EMS responses in a safe, consistent and non-arbitrary manner. EMS systems with emergency medical dispatchers trained to this practice provide pre-arrival instructions to the caller to assist the patient until pre-hospital care arrives. The EMD concept provides for safer vehicle response configurations and modes. It may reduce operating costs by preserving specialized EMS resources for those emergencies requiring them.

The EMD training curriculum is not intended to furnish all inclusive telecommunications education required for the emergency medical dispatcher or public safety telecommunicator. EMD training provides only the additional education affecting the practice of dispatching emergency medical resources such as ambulances, rescue units, first responder units and other types of responding units of an emergency medical nature; coordinating these response units with those of other public safety agencies; and providing instructions to the calling party to assist in preserving life prior to the arrival of responding units. The curriculum is intended to provide specific knowledge and medical information above that required of a previously trained and educated basic public safety telecommunicator. EMD training is only one module of education required of emergency medical services telecommunicators. It is a subspecialty of both public safety communications and emergency medical services systems that is required within a comprehensive public safety communications center where other disciplines of communications are practiced and should be present in all EMS systems. Additional disciplines include law enforcement, fire, and aeromedical telecommunications.

This practice is one of a set of applicable standards relating to the emergency medical dispatch function. The reader is directed to obtain related ASTM documents that encompass the administration of EMD programs and Practice [F1258](#).

1. Scope

1.1 This practice covers the training structure and primary function of emergency medical dispatchers. The primary function of the emergency medical dispatcher is the management of

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calls for emergency medical assistance as outlined in Practice [F1258](#) and NAEMSP Position Paper on emergency medical dispatch. Training as an emergency medical technician, paramedic, nurse, physician, or basic telecommunicator does not prepare a person to function as an EMD. The emergency medical dispatching functions have become so specialized that only an individual with dispatch specific medical training can perform the required tasks. This practice will delineate the training structure for the essential role of emergency medical dispatcher.

1.2 This practice is intended to outline the basic areas of knowledge required for an EMD, and to standardize the expectations and training between the various educational settings that are available to deliver the EMD training. This practice is not intended to serve as a curriculum for a training agency. All curricula developed or selected shall include the key components outlined in this practice.

1.3 It is understood that each agency may possess special and unique needs related to the training of EMDs. However, those specialty training areas that lie outside the scope of this standard shall not be included in selected 24 h minimum curriculum delineated by this practice. Additional training as desired may be annexed but may not supplant the learning goals required by this practice.

1.4 The scope of this standard includes:

1.4.1 EMD instructor qualifications,

1.4.2 Student selection criteria for emergency medical dispatcher candidates,

1.4.3 Emergency medical dispatcher training curriculum guideline,

1.4.4 Guidelines for EMD course goals and minimum time allocations,

1.4.5 Testing and evaluation of the student utilizing the stated course goals as basis for certification or certification eligibility as an emergency medical dispatcher,

1.4.6 Recommended equipment, materials, and facilities for training,

1.4.7 Guidelines for training course administration and record maintenance, and

1.4.8 Guidelines for an optional EMD preceptorship.

1.5 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ASTM Standards*:²

F1177 [Terminology Relating to Emergency Medical Services](#)

F1258 [Practice for Emergency Medical Dispatch](#)

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:*

3.1.1 *coding*—the selection and assignment of an alphanumeric classification to a call by an EMD.

3.1.2 *emergency medical dispatcher (EMD)*—a trained public safety telecommunicator with additional training and specific emergency medical knowledge essential for the efficient management of emergency medical communications.

3.1.3 *emergency medical dispatch priority reference system (EMDPRS)*—a medically approved reference system used by a

local dispatch agency to dispatch aid to medical emergencies, which includes: systematized caller interrogation questions, systematized pre-arrival instructions, and protocols matching the dispatcher's evaluation of injury or illness severity with vehicle response mode and configuration.

3.1.3.1 *Discussion*—An EMDPRS is not any particular proprietary set of cards or questions. It is a generic set of protocols meeting this description.

3.1.4 *EMD preceptorship*—a supervised dispatcher internship sponsored by the training agency.

3.1.5 *EMD selection*—the process that establishes criteria to identify a candidate for training as an emergency medical dispatcher (EMD).

3.1.6 *pre-arrival instructions*—telephone rendered, medically approved written instructions given by trained emergency medical dispatchers through callers that help to provide aid to the victim and control of the situation prior to patient access by pre-hospital care providers.

3.1.7 *public safety telecommunicator*—an individual trained to communicate by electronic means with persons seeking emergency assistance and with agencies and individuals providing such assistance.

4. Significance and Use

4.1 The emergency medical dispatcher should be a specially trained telecommunicator with specific emergency medical knowledge. These EMS personnel have traditionally performed this role without the benefits of dispatch specific medical training and medically sound protocols. Prompt, correct, and appropriate patient care can be enhanced with the use of a standardized approach to selection, training and performance assessment. This standard guide is intended for use by agencies, organizations and jurisdictions having the responsibility for providing the training, practice, and evaluation of emergency medical dispatchers.

5. Instructor Qualifications

5.1 All instructors shall be thoroughly knowledgeable about the emergency medical dispatching environment and with the working environment of public safety telecommunications.

5.2 It is essential that the emergency medical dispatch instructor be capable of understanding, adequately presenting, and defending ALS level-Dispatch Life Support information. This necessitates that the instructor responsible for teaching the medical portion of the training program have training, skill, and experience at the advanced EMT (EMT-I/EMT-P) level. Alternatively, this instructor may be a critical care trained physician, nurse or physician assistant. This level of instructor qualification is necessary to facilitate the student's understanding of medical classifications necessary to interrogate and evaluate the input of the caller, as well as their ability to systematically categorize the information obtained from the caller and assign appropriate and locally designed response configurations and modes.

5.3 The instructor shall have proven competence as an instructor in a related field.

² For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, www.astm.org, or contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org. For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.