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PROFESSIONALISM

Prehospital Care as a Profession – Are we there yet?

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Dr. Hugh Grantham

How will we know when we are professional?

A small child in the back seat of the car asks “Are the there yet?” Where ‘there’ is and how much further there is to travel is never very clear. Somewhat like the child, the ambulance industry has been asking, “are we professional yet?” And wondering what exactly that means.

To understand the meaning of professional in an ambulance context, we have to have a clear view of roles and relationships. Ambulance provides emergency medical care as part of the overall health system. Without the contribution of ambulance, other players in the health system would be unable to perform to their best. Without the contribution of the other health professionals, ambulance would be unable to deliver the optimum clinical benefit.

Other health professionals in our network play their parts and are considered professional because of the way in which they play their parts. Professional behavior is not territorial but is collaborative and focused upon the benefits to patients. When a *supposed* professional acts in an unprofessional fashion out of self interest it is noted by their peers. Ideally, professionals would be aware of their own behavior and adjust their behavior without external input.

The hall marks of professional behavior are that the motivation for actions is based upon other than self interest and that the professional is self regulating, striving to improve performance in order to better play their part.

How will we know when we have got there?

When others who act in a professional manner and are respected by the rest of the community acknowledge a newcomer to the scene as professional, they have arrived. On reflection, ambulance as a profession could be said to have already arrived. The respect of other health professionals in the system is evident in the fact that ambulance opinion is now sought for the value of its input. This occurs at the hospital handover and at the strategic committee level.

In arriving we note that it had nothing to do with any establishment of territory or formulation of ethical boards or other process issues. These may follow if they are deemed useful, however, they may not be necessary. For example the professional ambulance service is not threatened by others performing prehospital care beside them but recognizes and welcomes the integration across the system. As ambulance becomes professional the role of ambulance within the health care system becomes at once defined, accepted and yet blurred. The blurring

of an ambulance role to meet the demands of specific situations for the benefit of our patients is part of the professional integration of ambulance into the overall medical system.

I think we have arrived but because this has happened quietly with little ceremony, people do not realize that we are professional until they take time to notice how other respected professionals treat us.

Hugh Grantham