

2012

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Recommended Citation

Pointon, T. (2004). Development of Professional Paramedic Education at Flinders University, Adelaide, South Australia.. *Australasian Journal of Paramedicine*, 2(1).

Retrieved from <http://ro.ecu.edu.au/jephc/vol2/iss1/15>

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.

<http://ro.ecu.edu.au/jephc/vol2/iss1/15>

PROFILE

**DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL PARAMEDIC EDUCATION AT FLINDERS
UNIVERSITY, ADELAIDE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA.**

Article No. 990084

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Partnership between SA Ambulance Service and Flinders University

Paramedic education and training in South Australia has been conducted for the past 25 years by the Ambulance Education Unit (AEU), which is a department within SA Ambulance Service. In 1998, the AEU commenced a partnering arrangement with Flinders University, School of Medicine to provide paramedic education at the tertiary level. Currently this includes the Bachelor of Health Sciences (Paramedic) and Master of Health Science (Prehospital and Emergency Care) programs. At the same time, the AEU continues to provide Vocational Education Training (VET) to career and volunteer staff at various nationally accredited levels.

Both VET and Tertiary education is conducted in shared facilities at Sturt Campus of Flinders University, Adelaide, South Australia. The current structure of the tertiary program is a collaborative arrangement between SA Ambulance Service and Flinders University. It is taught by Health Science academic staff, seconded SA Ambulance Service staff with academic status and medical specialists.

The Underpinning Philosophies

The Bachelor of Health Science (Paramedic) philosophies are:-

- To maintain close ties between the SA Ambulance Service and Flinders University; the relationship is recognised as vital for the development of a course that appropriately serves the industry.
- An emphasis on clinical practice to equip graduates with the practical skills required to enter the workforce. Development of this practical theme within a traditionally theoretical educational structure & curriculum has been a challenging undertaking and has not yet reached its desired conclusion. The cooperation between SA Ambulance Service and Flinders University has been vital in this process. Secondment of experienced SA Ambulance Service staff and the structuring of clinical placements are recognised as vital components of this education.
- An internship year to consolidate clinical practice is regarded as essential to the development of industry ready paramedics. SA Ambulance Service is responsible for the provision of this phase of the education. To effectively support the internship, SA Ambulance Service is committed to ongoing staff development in the skills of mentoring, to ensure adequate student & graduate support.

- A broad base of education, covering not only the stream topics relating directly to paramedic practice, but also the health science core topics, it is believed that the breadth of knowledge allows for an enhanced understanding of the complex multi-disciplinary context of health care. This provides well rounded graduates with a broad perspective, a wide range of career opportunities and an ability to work as part of an integrated health system.
- Principles of access and equal opportunities are fundamental to education provided by both SA Ambulance Service and Flinders University. This is reflected in the development of alternate educational pathways which will in future allow articulation from certificate level into the degree program.

Curriculum Overview and Structure

- **The Bachelor of Health Science (Paramedic)**

The program is the key pre-employment qualification offered by Flinders University for paramedics. The course incorporates ten paramedic stream topics and ten core topics from Health Science.

Core topics are common to degree programs in Nursing, Midwifery, Disability Studies and the other professional streams of the Bachelor of Health Science, such as Health Promotion, Management, Life Science, Computing and Occupational Health and Safety. These topics cover a broad range of essential learning in sociology, psychology, legal issues, health care systems, bioscience, research and epidemiology. Skills are gained in critical thinking, interpersonal skills and information technology.

Paramedic stream topics progress from an introduction to paramedic practice & technology in first year, to second and third year topics which extensively cover pathophysiology of the various body systems. There are also stream topics on applied pharmacology & professional issues. Many of the second and third year topics are already offered in a distance mode using the internet. The remainder of the second and third year topics are currently being developed for distance presentation and are expected to be phased in progressively over 2005 and 2006.

Stream topics are supported by practical workshops which allow students to develop an understanding of the skill required in patient care. This is further supported by approximately 500 hours of on-road clinical placements, conducted throughout the three years of the degree.

Students with existing tertiary qualifications in nursing or health science may apply to undertake a 'fast track' program to gain the Bachelor of Health Science (Paramedic) in 12 or 18 months respectively. Limited places are available and are awarded based on the students' grade point averages.

Current SA Ambulance Service intensive care paramedics and paramedics may apply for a conversion program, which allows them to complete the Bachelor of Health Science (Paramedic) in 12 or 18 months respectively.

On completion of the Bachelor of Health Science (Paramedic) graduates may apply for an internship program conducted by SA Ambulance Service. During the internship, students are employed by SA Ambulance Service on a twelve month contractual basis. It is a multistage process which progresses the novice graduate through to a fully qualified paramedic, with an emphasis on effective graduate

mentoring and evaluation. Interns receive intensive practical training which is focused on supporting the clinical application of the theoretical knowledge already gained. Interns are also supported whilst working on-road by dedicated paramedics, who are trained in the skills in mentoring.

- **Master of Health Science (Pre-hospital and Emergency Care)**

This is a 72 unit coursework masters with an associated research project. It provides opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills to undertake independent study in the area of pre-hospital and emergency care.

It is specifically aimed at developing a greater understanding of issues involved in the provision of an ambulance service and the value of research to the industry. Coursework topics include a detailed investigation of concepts and issues of pre-Hospital and emergency care, and topics which enable the student to gain competence in research methodology. There is also scope to undertake 12 units of elective topics in a range of disciplines including health, science, management or law. The program culminates with a research project, which is presented in a final seminar and thesis.

Student Profile

Students in the Bachelor of Health Science (Paramedic) have been derived from a broad range of applicants, with a mix of school leavers and mature aged students, who bring a wide variety of past life experience. Within a total quota of 50 students, sub-quotas exist to allocate places to 'fast track' nursing or health science graduates, paramedics seeking conversion from diploma qualifications, TAFE qualified and indigenous students.

South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre (SATAC) processes applications for all undergraduate courses in South Australia. The Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) or equivalent is used as the entry requirement.

Flinders University is committed to equity programs and innovative ways of providing access to its normal courses for people from non-traditional backgrounds. SA Ambulance Service is also keen to attract diversity in its workforce as part of its equity and diversity strategy. To this end, Flinders University and SA Ambulance Service are exploring funding opportunities through the Department of Health to encourage indigenous students and other diversity in the student quota. There is also a strong commitment to attracting international students, with the paramedic program having already played host to a number of these students.

Students are required to complete some testing prior to enrolment as a prerequisite for clinical placements. The testing is equivalent to that undertaken by prospective SA Ambulance Service employees. This ensures that students understand their suitability for employment prior to committing to the study. The testing involves a medical examination, strength & fitness tests, psychological profiling and a police clearance.

Future

The immediate future will see a formalisation of a joint co-operative agreement between SA Ambulance Service and Flinders University, replacing a dated

Directions

memorandum of understanding. This will take into account a range of issues, including formal secondments of teaching staff, agreements about clinical placements, development of an improved internship and funding arrangements.

In addition to the current research pathway of the Masters program, further pathways of relevance to the prehospital health systems are being considered. These are expected to provide exciting opportunities for further specialised study and research in the evolving field of prehospital care provision.

Online delivery of the Bachelor of Health Science (Paramedic) will be available for all second and third year topics in the award by the end of 2006. Some workshops will continue to be delivered on campus, requiring a minimal attendance by remote students. Initiatives for delivery of the program to rural communities within South Australia are being investigated. Delivery of the program off-shore in partnership with other agencies is being explored.

Further Information

The Bachelor of Health Science (Paramedic) information may be obtained from the Flinders University website at:
<http://www.flinders.edu.au/courses/ugrad/bachelor/bhscas.htm>

Information about the Master of Health Science (Prehospital and Emergency Care) may be obtained at: <http://www.flinders.edu.au/courses/postgrad/pec.htm>

Information regarding applications to tertiary studies within South Australia can be obtained from the SATAC website at: <http://www.satac.edu.au/index.htm>

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