

Beyond the Ambulance: Evolving Roles for EMS Professionals

By Steve Tafoya, MLS, MBA, CCP

One of the frequently asked questions I received while in charge of the state was, "What else can I do with my EMS certification besides working on an ambulance?" Over time, with the growth of community paramedicine, mobile integrated health, and state regulations allowing for non-transport EMS agencies, the role of EMS providers has expanded significantly.

Traditionally, we think of EMS agencies as 911 response systems that operate ambulances authorized to transport patients. However, many states also permit non-transport agencies. These can include industrial settings such as mines and warehouses, special event teams, or corporate safety teams. In these contexts, EMS providers stabilize patients until a transport agency, arranged through a memorandum of understanding or local 911 dispatch, arrives to complete the transport. Non-transport agencies are still required to have a medical director and must undergo the State EMS permitting process; they simply select non-transport instead of transport. For example, Michigan law mandates that anyone operating a non-transport prehospital life support operation must hold a license under MCL-Section 20926 and comply with staffing, equipment, and oversight requirements outlined in MCL-Section 20927. Additionally, Michigan Administrative Code rules further delineate operational standards.

Many of these positions involve dual roles. For example, a warehouse employee might work in logistics but take on EMS responsibilities when a medical issue arises. Similarly, a mine operator may handle occupational safety tasks and then switch to EMS duties in the event of an incident. This approach is efficient for employers and offers career flexibility for EMS professionals.

There is an increasing number of EMS-certified individuals working under a physician's license rather than as part of a permitted EMS agency. These positions may include roles in intravenous hydration and therapy clinics, wellness centers, or hospital-based care. In these instances, EMS professionals act as physician extenders, practicing within the scope of their certification under direct physician supervision. According to North Dakota regulations, EMS professionals working in hospitals do so based on facility credentialing and medical staff policies, rather than through EMS agency licensure.

In emergency departments, urgent care centers, and catheterization labs, paramedics may assume patient assignments, manage intravenous lines, administer medications, and conduct assessments within their certified scope of practice. These responsibilities are typically regulated by hospital policies and overseen by supervising physicians, rather than by EMS protocols. Community paramedicine adds another dimension. While it typically operates through a permitted EMS agency, some services now offer wellness visits, IV therapy, or legal blood draws. In many states, paramedics and AEMTs are recognized as qualified to perform phlebotomy and other technical skills under physician direction.

If you're looking for one of these roles, remember that job titles can vary. A hospital might not advertise a position as "Paramedic-Cath Lab," even if it requires EMS certification. Instead, you may come across titles like "Cath Lab Technologist" or "Urgent Care Paramedic." When reviewing job listings, pay attention to EMS-related qualifications such as NREMT-NRP or state paramedic certification in the requirements. Therefore, when searching for positions beyond ambulance work, using broader keywords like "technician," "occupational health," or "site safety and health officer" can help you find relevant opportunities. If you're considering one of these non-traditional roles, ask the following:

- Does your state allow EMS-certified personnel to work in dual roles or outside permitted EMS agencies?
- Are you covered under the company's or physician's malpractice policy, or do you need your own?
- Does the organization provide protocols or a clearly defined scope of practice?
- Is there structured training and regular oversight from a medical director?

These options also provide opportunities for EMS professionals who can no longer work on ambulances due to physical limitations. Clinic and wellness roles enable experienced providers to continue their practice in less physically demanding environments. EMS is evolving in a manner similar to nursing, which has expanded from hospital-based roles into schools, clinics, public health, and consulting. As new career paths emerge, the field will benefit from improved retention, greater variety in job roles, and increased wage potential over time.

EMS regulations draw clear lines between agency roles and individual certification, but they also allow for new approaches. Whether you're working in a warehouse, clinic, industrial site, or healthcare setting, your certification can support a career beyond the ambulance.

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