

Australian EMS in an International Comparison

Introduction

Australia is a geographically isolated country; but with current travel and technological trends by no means a socially or professionally isolated country.

Are Australian Emergency Medical Services comparable and 'competitive' - clinically and operationally - in an international comparison?

Objectives

The primary aim of this study trip was to meet with paramedics from different countries, experience their service and compare it with Australian EMS. Topics included current trends and technologies, operations, clinical levels and organisation, education, training, and paramedic professionalism.

Bilateral gains were to be drawn from this professional and cultural exchange: to find out what other services may be doing better (and consider the applicability in Australia), as well as promoting international collaboration, both professionally and educationally.

A secondary aim was to gauge the knowledge about and opinions of Australian EMS by foreign paramedics, in addition to establishing international networks.

Methods

Information was gathered by means of structured interviews during May and June 2011 with six paramedics from five different services in four different countries, including the author's own. An observer shift was organised in five cities in order to experience the paramedics working environment. Additional minor quantitative data was obtained from online research and correspondence.

Down Under or Above and Beyond?

Countries and services compared

Perth, Western Australia: St John Ambulance
London, England: London Ambulance Service
Edinburgh, Scotland: Scottish Ambulance Service
New York City, USA: Jamaica & Maimonides Hospital EMS
Alameda County, California, USA: American Medical Response
Toronto, Canada: Toronto & York EMS



References

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Findings

Australian EMS has no reason to shy away from an international comparison. Working conditions and environment are satisfactory, clinical levels as well as education standards are high. Respect amongst the public is unprecedented in Australia (Signy, 2011) - although North America does have a dedicated week (EMS week) each year in honour of EMS ("EMS Week Ideas", n.d.).

Another positive for Australian EMS is that the profession is paramedic driven, with high involvement of paramedics in research ("UK Paramedic expert at CSU", n.d.). Clinical direction is also paramedic driven; doctors only have a consulting role and are not directly involved in patient care.

Australia is the only country amongst the compared that does not have any kind of structured registration overseen by an external agency; the UK has a nationwide registration for paramedics (Health Professions Council, n.d.), whereas in the United States (National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians, n.d.) and Canada registration (Paramedic Association of Canada, n.d.) for all providers is state and province based, respectively.

Finally, this trip helped me with personal and professional growth, and international exchange should be promoted as such. (Lee, 2004)

Conclusion

Australia boasts great EMS compared to other countries. Whilst the perfect out of hospital system and service has yet to develop, Australian services are well developed for their role.

Although perhaps seen as the underdog in some cases, Australian EMS has no reason to hide behind its international counterparts, and can be a leader by example.