British Columbia is the westernmost province of Canada. BC Emergency Health Services (BCEHS) provides ground and air emergency medical services to BC’s 4.75 million inhabitants (Statistics Canada, n.d.) through more than 180 stations in metropolitan, urban, rural, and remote communities throughout the province. BC’s 4,600 paramedics and dispatchers are represented by the Ambulance Paramedics of BC (APBC). Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC) is a public post-secondary degree-granting institution providing paramedical education and continuing medical education for a wide range of health and community-based practitioners across the province and internationally. This article focuses on current research and operational initiatives, with a particular focus on a Paramedic Association of Canada-sponsored study that provided the foundation for the new Canadian Paramedic Profile.
The results of that study included the development of a model for describing four dimensions of paramedic practice: Who the practitioners are; What types of care they provide; Where they practice; and, What patient disposition options are available? This framework is useful for analyzing the evolution of paramedic practice into new practice settings, different types of care, and alternative outcomes (Bowles & Van Beek, in press).

JIBC also housed a national study, funded by the Paramedic Association of Canada (PAC), to support the development of the new Canadian Paramedic Profile. Three paramedic researchers, Dr. Ron Bowles, Dr. Becky Donelon, and Dr. Walter Tavares conducted a mixed methods study to articulate the key attributes and characteristics required of paramedics in Canada, regardless of their certification level or practice setting. The study included concurrent streams: a discourse and content analysis of how paramedics are described in academic, professional, and grey literature; and in-depth semi-structured interviews with twenty-one key stakeholders in Canadian paramedicine. The results were analyzed individually, then combined for more in-depth analysis. Following a process of inductive analysis, the study identified a series of framing concepts, cross-cutting themes, and roles that describe current and anticipated paramedic practice in Canada to 2025 (Tavares, Bowles, Donelon, 2016).

The study found three framing concepts that are essential to understanding paramedicine in Canada: paramedics now practice in a diverse and growing set of practice contexts (e.g., industry, community, in-facility), paramedics engage in multiple and embedded sets of interpersonal relationships, and a recognition that all patient encounters have both a medical/health and a social/cultural context which must be considered. The four cross-cutting themes included patient safety, compassion, communication, and adaptability/problem-solving. The study identified six roles that paramedics assume: Clinician, Professional, Educator, Team Member, Advocate, and Reflective Practitioner. These roles are integrated within the overall role of Paramedic Practitioner. These roles form the structure of the recently released Canadian Paramedic Profile (Paramedic Association of Canada, 2017).
JIBC is also engaged in research that supports individual paramedic, allied health and public safety practitioners. Recent and current studies include an exploration of precipitates to workplace violence against paramedics. The study explores what factors, if any, are associated with propensity for the violent victimization of paramedics in Canada. This study defines violence as verbal assault, intimidation, physical assault, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. A second study addresses the development of personal resilience. This study evaluates an open-access course on building and strengthening personal resiliency that has been designed, from the ground up, by experts in emergency response, for persons who are employed or volunteer in professions that require them to respond to a wide range of emergency situations.

Paramedicine is a rapidly evolving discipline, with paramedics taking on new job functions in non-traditional contexts while continuing to provide urgent and emergency care in the out-of-hospital setting. Within British Columbia, key stakeholders in paramedicine including BC Emergency Health Services, Ambulance Paramedics of BC and Justice Institute of British Columbia are working to better prepare and support paramedic practitioners through innovative operational initiatives, advanced education and training programs, and ongoing applied research.

Mission Critical

Professional Doctorate in Emergency Services Management

Starting September 2017

Do you see yourself as a strategic emergency service leader?

In a rapidly changing and challenging world strategic emergency service leadership has emerged at the forefront of civil protection in the UK. Join a relevant and critical programme of research to help you develop your career skills and influence policy makers, public institutions and services to identify, monitor and manage risk sources and situations.

ehu.ac.uk/esm