

Arlington CTE - *Keeping it Real*, Episode 4
Responses (some portions edited) from the Q & A

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Since the EMT Program at the Career Center partnered with Northern Virginia Community College in 2016, becoming a dual enrollment program, what are some of the big changes for students?

We worked with the NVCC Medical Education Campus and introduced our strong group of students and how a partnership for the EMS 120 (Clinical Rotations component of the program) would benefit both sides. The dual enrollment program for this class was immediately created in the 2015/16 academic year. With this program, qualified EMT students are exposed to 28 hours of prehospital care via their “ride-alongs” (12 hours) and clinical rotations in area hospitals (16 hours).

How has enrollment in the EMT program changed since becoming a dual-enrollment class?

Each year we have maintained at least 55 students by the end of the academic year. Dual enrollment option, providing 8 credits at the NVCC level to our students for EMS 111 D/E and the additional one credit hour for the EMS 120 D/E class has certainly been, and continues to be, a driving force in the number of students wanting to take the class every year.

Please describe the types of clinical experiences available to students in the program?

Students have the unique opportunity to be inside an ambulance during a 12-hour (non-stop, one time) rotation. They are in the observational status but often asked to help out with basic skills that they have already developed during the class up until that point (rotations start in February). Through their experience, students witness how calls come to stations, how the ambulance crew works and responds to those calls. Sometimes, they are paired with a paramedic and therefore are able to witness more advanced life support care given to patients. When calls might not come, students become a part of the training that is conducted in the stations as they wait for the calls. During their 16 hour hospital rotations (can be completed in four 4-hours or two 8-hour shifts), the modus operandi is different. In an ambulance, students respond when the call comes in. In a hospital setting, they witness what happens after patients are brought to the hospital. Therefore, in a hospital-setting, students tend to see far many more patients. They are asked by the nurse in charge to conduct patient interviews, take vital signs and write patient care reports for us to evaluate them. Department of Health and OEMS regulations stipulate that students have 10-patient interactions as one of their prerequisites to stand for the EMS certification test. OEMS also makes it easier stating that a minimum of five of these patients will need to be in clinical settings. This means that students have to conduct five

additional assessments on simulated patients under the guidance of their instructors.

The EMT Program at APS and NVCC believe in providing more live experience to our students. Therefore, the joint program that we have allows our students to see more than 10 actual patients in clinical and prehospital settings during their 28-hour exposure to emergency care. This inevitably increases their confidence in the ability to attend to patients even before they take their certification test. Finally, in addition to NVCC experience, SAGE Training (contractor to APS EMT program) has an ongoing relationship with EMS Station 3 in Waldorf, MD. We regularly send students to the station if they express interest in furthering their field experiences. The deputy chief of the station is a former skills instructor at the Arlington Career Center.

How does this class prepare students to take and pass the VA Department of Health EMT Basic exam?

The EMT class is divided into sections: cognitive learnings that includes class lectures and guest speakers that educate the students on the content of the exam administered by the National Registry of EMT (NREMT) as well as skills labs. In an effort to standardize EMS training across the country, states have been encouraged to join NREMT standards of EMS education. VA is one of those many states. Even though the written exam is administered by the NREMT, the practical (psychomotor) exam is still administered by VA.

Three out of the five days every week, there are lectures and student feedback and questions on materials not clarified. The remaining two days of the week are allocated to skills lab and training. These are hands-on sessions that are designed to prepare students for the psychomotor exam.

What certifications are earned by students taking this class?

Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) is a prerequisite to taking the EMT class. Students are given this training the first two weeks of the academic year. By mid-September, qualified candidates have their CPR certification. Students can also gain their EMT certification following the completion of the class. They need to be qualified to stand for the certification test, practical and written.

What are some industry connections and opportunities provided to students?

Students have the opportunity to meet with potential significant connections during their ride-alongs and hospital rotations. In addition, the dual enrolled students can take advantage of access to NOVA faculty and activities that provide them with much-needed industry and employment information in the field.

The majority of our students continue their education at the college level almost immediately after the certification as most of them are seniors. Juniors also predominantly make that decision a year after. Some students who continue their education in the area choose to follow their prehospital care experience by joining rescue squads in the city their college is located. I am happy to receive a number of recommendation letter requests for such students. UVA and Virginia Tech are strong examples of colleges that accept our students into their local ambulance and fire services.

Summary of responses from Nicole, a senior at Yorktown HS and Jenna, a senior at Washington-Liberty:

How have the clinical experiences prepared you for college or a career in the medical field?

N: The clinical rotations for this class were a new experience, unlike anything I've done before. Most of high school has been focused on academic learning, but this is totally different. Jumping into something so different can be daunting and getting to where you feel comfortable with that is a skill. And any skill needs practice, which the rotations are giving me. I'm expecting that there will be lots of new and different experiences in college, so this is going to help prepare me for that. This ability to adapt and react to new situations is a skill that anyone in the medical field might need, because you

never know what is going to happen and each day could be so different.

One major piece of the clinical rotations is that it is a chance to directly apply the skills and information we learned in class. Even though we are mainly just observing, it is still a chance to see what we've been learning getting put into practice. We don't really get to see that happen much in high school, so it is a more direct preparation for when I will have a career and need to apply the things I learn in school.

J: College will be a series of new experiences and stressful situations that I will have to deal with on my own. I won't have the protection of my family being there with me, and although I can't wait to be on my own, I know it will be difficult. The clinical rotations are like a different side of the same coin, having new experiences in stressful situations and adapting to changes and new environments. I am naturally a pretty nervous person and these rotations were definially outside of my comfort zone. There will be tons of experiences in college, and after, which will be out of my comfort zone and starting now will help me prepare. I had an 8 hour shift for one of my clinical rotations. I was very nervous at first and 8 hours seemed quite daunting, but after I became more settled, I felt more comfortable and relaxed. I ended up making friends with the nurse I shadowed and having a lot of fun while she showed me how to do different things and let me observe new procedures. The 8 hours went by quite quickly. Each rotation was filled with new experiences. All of my clinical rotations

were very different, with different types of emergencies and people. I know that each day in a career in the medical field will bring new experiences with different people and interactions, and no two days will be the same.

Can you discuss how the clinical experiences gained from either time spent in a local hospital emergency room or with a rescue squad helped you to better understand the role of an EMT or what a job in the medical field might be like?

N: There's no better way to learn about something than to see it up close, in action. This experience helped me to understand the role of a medical professional because I was seeing up close what they did every day. You can read or learn about the demands of a job or people can tell you about it, but unless you're there and seeing it, it's hard to get a good sense of what it's really like. The rotations helped me answer the questions: would I be able to handle the long shifts, could I handle the potential intensity or the stuff that I might see? That's the part of the job you don't really know until you see it, that you can't really glean from a textbook.

In the rotations, you're interacting with a lot of people who have been in the medical field for decades, so it's great to hear the different perspectives and the different experiences all these people have had. It helped me get a sense for what it's like and how it can vary from person to person.

J: One of the main reasons I decided to take this class was to see if I could actually handle being in the medical field. I have always wanted to do something medical related but I was not sure exactly what to expect and if I could handle such a stressful and demanding job. I have lived a good life that has been admittedly quite sheltered. I have been sheltered from the tragedies and stress of the real world. The clinical rotations gave me a taste of what a career in the medical field would be like. I never really thought of all the death that is involved in the medical field, I just thought about helping people. I thought of flu tests, casts for broken arms and drawing blood. But in my rotation I saw some real life experiences that as a high school student I would never have seen. In one of my first rotations, I saw a particularly emotional and stressful situation. A man came in with abdominal pain, and some alcohol intoxication. But while in the hospital, he reached for the blood pressure cord on the wall and wrapped it around his neck. He tried to strangle himself, but the nurse and tech who were there were able to stop him. I didn't really comprehend what had just happened, I have never seen anything like that before. It was so sudden and the next thing I know the tech is handing me all the cords in the room to keep out of this man's reach. I have experienced death before, my grandfather and uncle both died from a heart attack, but this was very different, this was an experience that will stick with me. That same day, a women had a miscarriage, and this wasn't her only one. She had lost twins only a few years ago shortly after she gave birth. Experiences like these helped me

to get a holistic view of what a job in the medical field might be like. I understand that it won't all be good days, but I also found that I can handle these experiences. The tragedies I saw that day only make me want to help people more.

Do you think the experiences gained in your EMT class have helped build confidence in preparing for an EMT certification exam?

N: These experiences have absolutely prepared me for the EMT certification exam. In my high school experience, most classes have been either fun or challenging, but this class is both. The teacher and skills instructors are wonderful and it's clear how much they love what they're doing. Mr. H does the lecturing part of the course, and he really makes it enjoyable for the students. He goes above and beyond in what he teaches, going deeper than the curriculum to make sure that the students not only learn the material, but understand the "why" behind the information.

We also get the chance to apply that knowledge and understanding with the hands-on portion of the class. The skills instructors are also fantastic; they are endlessly patient and understanding. They care about the students doing well and always make sure everyone understands a concept before moving on to the next. They put us through simulated scenarios that are as close to the EMT certification exam as they can get. At this point in the class, looking back at the

beginning of the year, it's hard to believe I was ever not confident about performing these skills.

J: Yes, but to be honest I am not as confident as I would like to be. This is no fault of my EMT instructors, but because of the coronavirus. As school is closed for the rest of the year, we are not able to practice all the skills needed for the certification exam. The time I have spent in class has definitely helped prepare me for the exam. My instructors are great, thoroughly explaining the skills and concepts, helping to make sure we are doing the skills correctly, and connecting the concepts and skill with personal stories that helped me to understand and remember the material better. I only wish I had more time to practice using the materials in the classroom with the help of the instructors. This end of the year critical practice time is lost, so it's difficult to say how confident and prepared I would be if we had this time back.