



Review

Student paramedic experience of transition into the workforce: A scoping review



Sean Kennedy^{a,1}, Amanda Kenny^{b,2}, Peter O'Meara^{b,3}

^a PO Box 813, Strathfieldsaye, Victoria, Australia

^b La Trobe Rural Health School, La Trobe University, Victoria, Australia

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SUMMARY

Objectives: In this article we present the findings from a scoping review that sought to identify what is known about the experiences of paramedic students transitioning into the workforce.

Background: Within the emergency healthcare sector, paramedics are primarily tasked with the assessment, treatment and safe transport of patients to hospital. New paramedics entering the workforce are exposed to the full extent of human emotion, injury and suffering as part of their everyday work. There is evidence from other healthcare disciplines that the transition to practice period can be difficult for new graduates.

Methods: We utilised Arksey and O'Malley's five-stage scoping review framework to identify what is known about the transition of paramedicine graduates to the workplace. The framework involves identifying relevant studies; study selection; charting the data; and collating, summarizing and reporting results.

Results: We identified eleven articles that explored transition of newly qualified paramedics. Thematic content was identified and discussed into four separate categories. Each theme revealing the emotional, physical and social impacts new paramedics face as they strive to find acceptance in a new workplace and culture.

Conclusion: Given the significant role that paramedics have in modern healthcare, the transition from student to practitioner is a period of significant stress to the new paramedic. Limited research in this field though inhibits a thorough understanding of these issues.

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Introduction

In this article we present our findings from a scoping review that sought to identify research related to the experience of paramedic students transitioning into the workplace. Within the broader healthcare literature, there is a growing body of knowledge that identifies the significant issues that students face when transitioning to the workplace (Boychuk Duchscher, 2008; Casey et al., 2004; Edwards, 2011; Michau et al., 2009; Smith and Pilling, 2007; Williams, 2012). Drawing on the seminal work of Kramer (1975), recent studies in nursing (Boychuk-Duchscher, 2009; McAllister and McKinnon, 2009; Phillips et al., 2012, 2013b) highlight the stressors that are experienced by new graduates and the emotional impacts of the conflict between what is learnt in the education setting and what is experienced in healthcare practice.

With little attention being given to the emotional impact and stressors attributed to the role of a paramedic (Williams, 2012), we believe that there is value in exploring the impact of transition on newly qualified paramedics.

Background

Within the emergency healthcare sector, paramedics primarily are tasked with the assessment, treatment and safe transport of patients to hospital (Caroline, 2008; Joyce et al., 2009). The nature of emergency work exposes paramedics to a wide variety of experiences from low acuity inter-hospital transfers, through potentially distressing multi-casualty incidents or violent patients. The diversity and extremes of the workplace, including long term repeated exposure to traumatic events, increases the risk of physical and mental health disorders such as burnout and post-traumatic stress disorder (Archer et al., 2011; Hegg-Deloye et al., 2013; Joyce et al., 2009).

As researchers working in the area of workforce development, we were interested in the transition experiences of student paramedics as they enter the workforce and whether the same 'reality shock' (Kramer, 1975) that has been described in nursing and allied health

E-mail addresses: stkennedy@students.latrobe.edu.au (S. Kennedy), a.kenny@latrobe.edu.au (A. Kenny), p.omeara@latrobe.edu.au (P. O'Meara).

¹ Tel.: +61 3 0422 817 376; fax: +61 3 5444 7977.

² Tel.: +61 3 5444 7545; fax: +61 3 5444 7977.

³ Tel.: +61 3 5444 7870; fax: +61 3 5444 7977.

literature (Boychuk-Duchscher, 2009; Casey et al., 2004; Newton and McKenna, 2007) has been documented for paramedics.

Method

Study Design

Scoping reviews are useful for a broad analysis of literature when exploring an under examined area of research (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). They differ from systematic reviews in that the focus is not on the assessment of the quality of studies, rather, on the examination of the range and nature of current research on a topic to identify gaps in knowledge (Levac et al., 2010). In paramedicine, an area where evidence is developing, Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) methodological framework for conducting a scoping review was deemed appropriate to support a standardised approach to the identification of the literature and limit personal bias in the interpretation of the material. The steps utilised from Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework included identifying the research question, identifying relevant studies, study selection, data charting and collating, summarising and reporting the results.

Stage 1: Identifying the Research Question

The focus of the study was to explore and document research that has been conducted into the experiences of paramedics as they undertake the transition from student to practitioner. The review question, 'what is known about student paramedic experiences of transitioning into the workforce' guided the study.

Stage 2: Identifying Relevant Studies

The primary search commenced in September 2013 with nine electronic databases identified for their ability to allow an extensive search of the healthcare literature: Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed, Medline, Cochrane Library, CINAHL, Informit, Clinical Evidence (BMJ), and Ovid.

Key words from the research question were combined into search terms considered by the researchers to relate to the research question: student AND paramedic AND experience, student AND para* AND transition, paramed* AND transition AND experience, student AND transition AND workforce, new AND paramed* AND transition. In certain countries, the terms *ambulance*, *EMT* (Emergency Medical Technician) and *EMS* (Emergency Medical Service) are synonymous with or used in place of the term *paramedic*. To prevent any unintentional exclusion of data from such sources, these terms were input into the above databases in substitution for paramed* in each search term combination.

A secondary web-based search commenced in October 2013 to identify areas of 'grey literature' that may contain data relevant to this study. This search was conducted in the same manner as the above by input of search term combinations into the following databases: Trove (theses database), BMC Proceedings, and British Library: conference collections, World Health Organisation, and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. A search was conducted utilising the online search engine Google Scholar. Some 13,800 'hits' were identified by the search engine and were reviewed. Again, due to timeframe and budget limitations, only the first 100 hits were reviewed as further screening was unlikely to reveal data of relevance.

To ensure a balance between time and cost limitations and a thorough review, initial studies were screened against a list of inclusion and exclusion criteria to increase the likelihood of their relevance to the research question (See Table 1).

Stage 3: Study Selection

A two-stage screening process was then conducted to identify the relevance of these studies to the research question. Due to timing and

Table 1
Inclusion/exclusion criteria.

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English (or translation)	Non-English
Country	All	None
Refers to key search terms in title or abstract	Majority present	Less than majority present
Date	Between 1990 and 2013	Any study outside these dates

funding limitations of this review, initial results were examined by their title and abstract against the inclusion and exclusion criteria (See Table 1). In the absence of an abstract, the entire document was scrutinised for relevance.

The primary search strategy was able to identify 936 articles. Overall, 10 potentially relevant articles were extracted for full text reading. In the secondary search of the grey literature, a total of 96 studies were identified as potentially relevant. After the application of our inclusion and exclusion criteria, six were chosen for further analysis. Finally, through the search engine Google Scholar, a total of 13,800 hits were indicated. Of the first 100 studies listed, thirty seven were selected. The authors imported the identified studies into EndNote citation manager, and duplicate studies were removed.

This initial process resulted in 38 potential studies being forwarded on to the next stage of review. The second screening process involved the examination of the entire document to ascertain its relevance to the research question. A final total of 11 studies were deemed to contain significant data relating to the research question. Although not all studies focused solely on the transitional experiences of paramedic students transitioning to the workforce, they were found to contain themes of significance to this area of research. Given the limited number of studies available in paramedicine alone (Hou et al., 2013), these have been included in this review (See Fig. 1).

Stage 4: Data Charting and Collation

We used a data collection form (Daudt et al., 2013) to support the extraction of data that enabled charting of a mix of both general information contained within the article, and information that best answered the research question. Described by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) as a descriptive analytical method, summaries of each article were developed that included author, journal, publication year, setting, country, research question and aim and theoretical framework/research design (See Table 2).

Of the 11 articles identified, Canada, Norway and the United Kingdom each were represented by one article each. The remaining ten originated in Australia.

Seven of the articles were research studies involving interviews or focus groups. Three utilised written surveys. The remaining three articles conducted an examination of the literature on paramedic-related topics. All articles were recent publications with dates ranging from 2004 to 2013.

Stage 5: Collating, Summarising and Reporting the Results

Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) fifth stage of the framework is the presentation of a structured report of articles identified by the scoping review, arranged by their thematic content. Of the 11 studies already identified, both Lazarsfeld-Jensen et al. (2011) and Filstad and McManus (2011) contained the greatest relevance to the research question. Yet significant contributions to this body of knowledge have been added by the remaining eleven studies, hence their inclusion. Following in-depth analysis of these studies, four thematic categories were developed: 'out of my depth', 'the discrepancy between theory and practice', 'the ability to fit in', and 'the expectation of controlled emotions'.

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