



# CAAHEP Accreditation FACTS

## What Does This Mean to EMS?

### 1. Why do we need Paramedic program accreditation?

**Answer:** The National EMS community asked for accreditation as part of the *EMS Education Agenda for the Future: A System's Approach* (2000). The Institute of Medicine's (IOM) *EMS At the Crossroads* (2006) also recommended a single national EMS accrediting agency for the country as part of a process of standardization in EMS education. Additionally, several current research articles published in peer-review academic journals indicate an increased success rate on national certification exams from graduates of nationally accredited Paramedic programs.

The CAAHEP accreditation process is designed to support continual program improvement. The peer review process is one essential element to the improvement of the EMS profession.

Accreditation in all areas of education and in particular, medical education is unique throughout the world. At the present time, EMS is one of the few, if not the only, allied health care profession that does not require its educational programs to be accredited. If the EMS professions are to ever enjoy the stability, respect, and benefits of being considered an allied health care profession, we must strive to meet nationally established standards of adult medical education.

### 2. Who is CAAHEP?

**Answer:** The Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) is the parent organization of the Committee on Accreditation of Educational Programs for the EMS Professions (CoAEMSP). CAAHEP is a non-profit, non-governmental agency, who reviews and accredits over 2000 educational programs in nineteen (19) health science occupations.

CAAHEP issues accreditation to Paramedic education programs, based on the review and recommendation of the CoAEMSP.

### 3. Is the CoAEMSP the only nationally accrediting agency for EMS?

**Answer:** YES. Although CAAHEP is the actual accrediting agency, the CoAEMSP represents the EMS profession and has over the past 30 years when the Paramedic was recognized as an allied health occupation by the American Medical Association in 1975. Currently, the CoAEMSP Board of Directors is sponsored by the following organizations:

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)  
 American College of Cardiology (ACC)  
 American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP)  
 American College of Osteopathic Emergency Physicians (ACOEP)  
 American College of Surgeons (ACS)  
 American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA)  
 Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP)  
 National Association of EMS Educators (NAEMSE)  
 National Association of EMS Physicians (NAEMSP)  
 National Association of EMT's (NAEMT)  
 National Association of State EMS Officials (NASEMSO)  
 National Registry of EMT's (NREMT)

These Sponsors represent the specialties and organizations of the EMS profession and are all committed to the accreditation process. The members of each sponsoring organization serve on the Board of Directors and perform duties as program Reviewers and Site Visitors, in addition to their many other duties and commitments. Currently, the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), EMS Section is petitioning to become an additional sponsor.

**4. I thought state EMS offices were responsible for authorizing training programs in my state. Does the CAAHEP accreditation process supercede our state EMS office?**

**Answer:** NO. Individual state laws, rules and requirements remain the central authority for who is authorized to provide EMS education in each state. The accreditation process is designed to supplement and support state EMS offices in providing clear guidelines and standards for education.

The CAAHEP process is not designed to be punitive and is not an enforcement tool. The CAAHEP standards are relatively broad since they apply to all programs throughout the United States. Individual states may have more specific requirements, or implement standards related to issues in their locale. Ultimately, the state EMS office remains the point authority in terms of allowing programs to function. However, state EMS offices are informed of the accreditation process of programs in their jurisdiction. This information includes notification of applications, scheduling of site visits, and other routine public matters throughout the accreditation process. Through the CoAEMSP structure, input from state EMS directors and state EMS training coordinators is solicited in the development of the CAAHEP standards.

**5. What does it cost to accredit our program?**

**Answer:** There are actually three components of the costs of accreditation.

There is an **Annual Fee** of \$1,200.00 per year to maintain the program's on-going accreditation and support the various services provided to programs by both CAAHEP and CoAEMSP. CAAHEP also has an Institutional Fee (\$450.00) that is due annually for the program. If your institution has more than one CAAHEP program this single fee is spread over all of the programs. Once every five (5) years, a site visit by two CoAEMSP reviewers is conducted. The program is responsible for paying the actual costs (travel, accommodations and meals) of the site visit. Depending on specific travel arrangements, these costs can vary. In most cases, the average cost of a site visit by two reviewers is approximately \$2500.00. Another cost associated with the 5 year review is a fee of \$500.00 for the executive review of the program's self study.

It is important to put these costs in context over a 5-year period, if your program serves 25 paramedic students per year X 5 years (125 students), the total costs for accreditation services would be:

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|---|------------|
| Annual Fee (\$1,200.00 X 5 years)             | \$6,000.00 |
| CAAHEP Institutional Fee (\$450.00 X 5 years) | \$2,250.00 |

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| Technology Fee (paid only once)          | \$ 250.00          |
| Site Visit every fifth year              | \$2,500.00         |
| Self Study review every fifth year       | \$500.00           |
| <b>Total</b>                             | <b>\$11,500.00</b> |
| Per student costs over five (5) years    | \$ 92.00           |
| <b>Per cost average per contact hour</b> | <b>\$ 0.084</b>    |

Generally, CAAHEP accreditation costs approximately **8.4 cents for each student**. Since the average Paramedic course is between 1000-1200 hours (1100 average) \$92.00 per student ÷ 1100 hours = 0.084 cents per contact hour, a minimal cost to the program for their accreditation investment.

**6. What is the process to become accredited and how long will it take?**

**Answer:** One size DOES NOT fit all. Every educational program is different and they will each have unique areas that require attention by CoAEMSP. There is no way to say for certain “how long” each school will take to gain accreditation through the CAAHEP process but clearly some are faster than others.

The process begins with the institutions submission of its self-study and fees to the CoAEMSP. The CoAEMSP Executive Director will read each Self-Study and complete an Executive Summary. The Summary will be sent to the Reviewer (a CoAEMSP Board member) and the Site Visitors, along with a copy of the Self-Study.

The Site Visit will be scheduled with input from both the program and the site review team. Once the site review takes place, the site review team completes their report and shares their findings with all the principal participants at an exit conference. The Site Report is returned to the Reviewer and Executive Director and the Reviewer will make a formal recommendation to the Board of Directors. Once approved, the recommendation will be sent to the CAAHEP Board, which meets every other month, for a final vote and approval. Accreditation certificates, recommendations and correspondence will be sent directly from CAAHEP once action is taken by the group.

Each application for accreditation receives individual attention by the CoAEMSP, and time lines vary, the general experience is that CAAHEP accreditation is granted within 6 – 12 months of initial receipt of the self-study.

**7. The whole process looks pretty intimidating. How do we get started?**

**Answer:** JUST DO IT. As mentioned in the famous advertisement, getting started is the hardest thing to do.

As you prepare for accreditation it is be important that you take time to become familiar with the process and required materials. The CoAEMSP website at [www.coaemsp.org](http://www.coaemsp.org) has many resources, including, Standards and Guidelines, an Initial Accreditation link that details all of the tabs you will fill in your accreditation notebook, as well as the Site Visitor Report (the actual document and questions asked by reviewers) and many other documents required for accreditation.

Contact the CoAEMSP office at (817) 330-0080 for more details or to get your questions answered.

**8. Is the Program Director required to possess a Bachelors degree?**

**Answer:** Yes. The CAAHEP Standards and Guidelines require the Program Director hold a Bachelors degree to run the program.

Recognizing this may impact programs seeking accreditation, the CoAEMSP Board of Directors in February, 2008 stated that ANY NEW program that submits their Self-Study and Fees to the CoAEMSP for evaluation prior to January 1, 2011 will allow the Program Director to demonstrate continual enrollment and progress (as defined by 15 semester hours per year) toward a Bachelors degree until successfully completed. This progress will be monitored by the CoAEMSP annually. Failure to meet the mandate will result in probation and loss of CAAHEP accreditation. There is NO mandate that requires PD's to possess a Master's degree, however it is recommended if they oversee a Paramedic educational program.

**9. Is it mandatory that our program be affiliated with a college or university?**

**Answer:** NO. However, the program **MUST** meet one of the sponsorship requirements outlined in the Standards and Guidelines.

Examples include:

- a) a post-secondary academic institution accredited by an institutional accrediting agency or equivalent recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and authorized to provide a post-secondary program or to approve college credit which awards a minimum of certificate of completion for the program (example - a college or university accredited by a regional institutional accreditor such as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools)
- b) foreign post-secondary academic institution approved by CAAHEP
- c) a hospital, clinic, or medical center accredited by a healthcare accrediting agency or equivalent recognized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, authorized to provide healthcare, which is affiliated with a post-secondary educational institution or equivalent, or an accredited graduate medical education program, which awards a certificate of completion for the program (example - an accredited residency program, accredited nursing school or accredited allied health school in a hospital and owned by a hospital)
- d) a branch of the U.S. Armed Forces or other governmental educational or medical service which is affiliated with an accredited post-secondary educational institution or equivalent which awards a minimum of certificate of completion for the program or approved national organization able to approve college credit (example - U.S. Public Health Service, U.S. Indian Health Service, or United States Army).

**10. Our program does not meet any of the current sponsorship requirements. Are there any options available to continue our Paramedic education program?**

**Answer:** Yes. The Standards and Guidelines permit the development of a **CONSORTIUM**. The Consortium allows a minimum of two (2) or more members, with an interest in operating an educational program to work together to meet the needs of their community.

At least one (1) member **MUST** meet the requirements of Sponsorship as defined by the Standards and Guidelines. The CoAEMSP provides a template for the Consortium which defines the roles and responsibilities of each member including governance and lines of authority.

**11. What about programs that are not “traditional” in the sense that they are not conducted within a school? Can they be accredited?**

**Answer:** Yes. There are currently accredited educational programs that are not within colleges, universities or major medical centers. Programs have been accredited in hospitals, private for profit institutions as well as free standing FIRE-based and EMS based institutions. Each program

is evaluated by the CoAEMSP to ensure they meet the Sponsorship requirements set forth in the Standards and Guidelines.

## **12, Is there a difference in institutional and programmatic accreditation?**

**Answer:** Yes. The terms both refer to accreditation however **INSTITUTIONAL** refers to the institution that holds accreditation of the university, community college, or hospital where various allied health care programs are taught. Organizations that provide institutional accreditation include the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the Western Association of Colleges and Schools as well as many others. These accrediting agencies are interested in the entire institution and its educational offerings.

**PROGRAMMATIC** accreditation refers specifically to the profession, in this case, the Paramedic educational program.

## **13. What are some of the MAJOR areas that create issues for programs applying for Initial Accreditation?**

**Answer:** It varies but many of the more common areas include:

- a) lack of PD holding a Bachelor's degree,
- b) lack of sufficient Medical Direction and oversight,
- c) lack of sufficient clinical and field internship opportunities where students see patients of varying ages, pathologies, complaints, gender and interventions
- d) lack of preceptor training programs
- e) lack of tracking mechanism to assure students progress
- f) use of only "canned" materials from publishers for curriculum as well as testing and measurement

EACH PROGRAM will be evaluated based on their compliance with the CAAHEP Standards and Guidelines. It is important to note that the goal of the accreditation process is to assist and support programs in becoming successful. When issues are identified, the CoAEMSP works closely with applicant programs to develop strategies that improve student outcomes. Programs are always given ample opportunity to address these, or any other issues identified through the review process. The CAAHEP accreditation process is designed to be an inclusive system, bringing programs into compliance through collegial communication, sharing of ideas, and supporting the growth and improvements of adult education systems throughout the United States.

## **14. How will the accreditation process help me and my community?**

**Answer:** The accreditation process promotes continual self analysis and is in place to make the program, its graduates, and ultimately, the care they deliver to the public, BETTER.

As in other professions, the accrediting agency helps identify opportunities for improvement from an outside perspective and then assists you, your faculty, and your program in finding solutions for them. Simply stated, it's harder for those in your organization to ignore the recommendations of an outside, independent agency that is recommending improvements in the educational process.

In reality, the accreditation process for educational programs is no different than the trauma center designation process, the review and accreditation process for air ambulance services, or the accreditation process for ground ambulance services. It is designed to support a philosophy of on-going improvements within your program that will ensure the highest quality education for EMS professionals throughout the country.

**15. Once the Initial Accreditation is conferred, what are the steps to maintain accreditation?**

**Answer:** A key component to future success is a continual assessment of what the program is accomplishing as it relates to the CAAHEP Standards and Guidelines. Accredited programs will submit an **Annual Report** that includes a summary of job placement, student attrition /retention; pass rates on the State and or National Registry of EMTs written and practical examinations as well as graduate and employer survey return rates. These data points are collected and evaluated by the CoAEMSP Board of Directors to determine compliance with the Standards and Guidelines as they relate to minimum thresholds for success. Programs that fall below standard thresholds are required to analyze these areas and develop action plans to improve future performance.

Additionally, the program must submit a new Self-Study and undergo a new Site Visit at the end of a five (5) year period to ensure compliance with the CAAHEP Standards and Guidelines. Programs that continue to critically examine themselves do not have difficulty achieving re-accreditation as part of the CAAHEP process.

**16. We are interested in Accreditation in our state. Will you be coming to visit us in the future to answer any questions that we may have?**

**Answer:** The Executive Director and members of the CoAEMSP Board will be visiting states throughout the nation at their request to talk more about the accreditation process and answer questions and concerns as they arise.

The goal is to assist states, Program Directors and educational leaders in learning more about how their program can meet the CAAHEP Standards and Guidelines for accreditation.

**17. I have a concern that someone from my state be doing our site-visit?**

**Answer:** That **WILL NOT** happen. The Site Visitors will be chosen from the pool of Physician and Paramedic Educators from outside your state and will travel to your program in order to ensure that the program meets the CAAHEP Standards and Guidelines as published.

In fact, during the CoAEMSP Board of Directors meetings where program actions are taken, members of the CoAEMSP Board of Directors who live in a state where a program is being considered, leave the room while program actions are taken. This extra effort is designed to ensure that each and every program receives a fair and unbiased evaluation and recommendation for accreditation by CAAHEP.

**18. EMS is a big community. How do I know that the Site Visitors won't spread what they have seen and heard about my program to others they know?**

**Answer:** ALL Site Visitors are required to sign a confidentiality statement for each visit they attend. This is done to ensure they are constantly aware of the confidentiality clause and the Site Visitor requirements. CoAEMSP takes these requirements seriously. If it happens, they will no longer be part of the CAAHEP process.

**19. I graduated from Paramedic school before the program was accredited. What does the lack of accreditation of my program then mean to me now?**

**Answer:** Other than pride in your school, NOTHING. The move towards programmatic accreditation for Paramedic educational programs only impacts graduates of those programs after December 31, 2012. After that date, the Board of Directors for the National Registry of EMT's has indicated that **PARAMEDIC GRADUATES ONLY** will become ineligible to take their certification exam if they did NOT graduate from a nationally accredited paramedic program.

Additionally, it has NO bearing or impact on your current recertification for continuing education. Only students who have yet to be trained will be impacted by the National Registry's requirement in 2013.

**20. Final thoughts about the EMS community and the CAAHEP accreditation process.**

**Answer:** The road to accreditation is a long but worthwhile venture. In the development of every profession, gaining greater credibility is tied to higher educational requirements. Accreditation, like any quality improvement process is a journey, not a destination. One mile marker is the achievement of initial accreditation which may be your *longest* mile. However, once the first mile is passed, the map becomes clearer for you in your continuous journey.

EMS is at a defining moment in its history and the move toward programmatic accreditation is necessary step in our evolution. The fact is, with hard work, determination, and tenacity, programs across the country can gain the CAAHEP recognition. Like many things in life it will not be easy and will require your best effort and perhaps an opportunity to look at things from a fresh perspective. We welcome the opportunity to work with EMS educators, states and those interested in accreditation and stand ready to assist in the years ahead.