

Emergency Medical Technician Education in Saudi Arabia: History and Challenges

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Abbreviations:

EMI: Emergency Medicine Institute
EMS: Emergency Medical Service
EMT: emergency medical technician

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Dear Editor,

We read the findings by Zakariah and colleagues with great interest.¹ The Emergency Medical Service (EMS) system in Saudi Arabia is one of the first in the Arabian Peninsula.² Up until recently, Saudi emergency medical technicians (EMTs) had to train outside Saudi Arabia, as the country had no institution that provided EMS training. In 2002, however, the Emergency Medicine Institute (EMI; Riyadh, Saudi Arabia) was established, and since then has been the only recognized program by the Saudi Council for Health Specialties (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia) as well as the Saudi Red Crescent Authority (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia).³

The EMI's paramedic program was developed based on the United States National Standard Curriculum for Paramedics.⁴ After being accepted into the program, students have to go through a six-unit course over a three-year period. The unit employs licensed paramedics and instructors, as well as emergency medicine physicians from Saudi Arabia, the US, and South Africa.⁴ This training program has been developed to help in producing skilled, knowledgeable, and well-trained EMTs who can respond to any emergency need.

Given the relative infancy of organized EMS in Saudi Arabia, it is vital to reflect on the quality of EMT training and graduates. While formal evaluation of training quality is yet to be conducted, several challenges have been identified in the literature, including students' perceived lack of confidence, trust, and independence,⁵ and deficits in EMS coverage of some geographical locations.⁶ Additionally, EMT trainees continue to face such societal challenges as refusal of treatment by patients and/or relatives,^{5,7} scene congestion caused by bystanders,⁵ and the high prevalence of cancelled emergency calls.⁷

Until identified challenges are addressed, immediately available resources ought to be prioritized with the goal of producing competent, Saudi-trained EMTs. This is not to minimize the importance of standardizing and evaluating licensing examinations; this, however, should temporarily take second precedence in the Saudi EMS agenda.

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