

Background

The nursing workforce shortage in the United States has reached critical levels (Baker, 2022). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects approximately 166,100 annual openings for registered nurses through 2034 (BLS, 2025). In New Jersey, workforce projections estimate nearly 27,000 RN openings by 2036 (New Jersey Collaborative Center for Nursing, 2025).

In response to these shortages, increasing numbers of emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and paramedics are transitioning into nursing roles. These professionals possess extensive pre-hospital clinical experience that may facilitate entry into nursing practice.

This poster presents reflections from the professional transition of a New York City paramedic to an emergency department registered nurse and provides guidance for EMTs and paramedics considering a transition into nursing practice.

Professional background

- 1991 – Bachelor's degree (Psychobiology)
- 1993 – Certified New York State EMT
- 1994 – Master of Public Health (Community Health Education)
- 1996 – Certified Paramedic (NY State & NYC)
- 2002 – MS in Health Services Administration
- 2023 – Associate Degree in Nursing
- 2024 – Emergency Department RN (ACS verified Level II Trauma Center)
- 4/26 – Completion of ED Nurse Residency Program (expected)
- 6/26 – BSN completion (expected)
- 12/26 – Doctor of Public Health completion (expected)



Who are EMTs and Paramedics?

Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) and paramedics provide pre-hospital emergency care to patients experiencing medical, traumatic, or behavioral emergencies. In New York State, EMT certification is required prior to paramedic training. EMT training programs average ~180 hours and focus on Basic Life Support (BLS) whereas Paramedic programs average ~1800 hours and focus on Advanced Life Support (ALS).

Clinical Responsibilities

Paramedics are trained to:

- Perform **comprehensive patient assessments**
- Interpret **12-lead electrocardiograms**
- Establish **IV/IO access**
- Administer life-saving **emergency medications** including **narcotics**
- Perform **advanced airway management** including **endotracheal intubation and CPAP**
- Conduct **needle decompression**

EMTs and paramedics stabilize patients and transport them to appropriate healthcare facilities for **definitive treatment**.

A comparison between paramedics and ED registered nurses

Shared Competencies Between Paramedics and Emergency Nurses

- Interdisciplinary teamwork in patient care delivery
- Certification in BLS, ACLS, and PALS
- Care of patients across the lifespan
- Use of clinical judgment and critical thinking
- Communication during patient handoff and transitions of care
- Exposure to high-stress clinical environments
- Risk of occupational stress, moral injury, and workplace violence
- Contribution to public health and emergency response systems

Key Differences in Professional Roles

ED Nurses	Paramedics
Work primarily in controlled clinical environments	Work primarily in unpredictable and unsafe field environments
Practice within the nursing process (assessment, diagnosis, planning, implementation, evaluation)	Practice using protocol-driven emergency care algorithms
Provide care based on physician or advanced practice provider orders	Provide care with protocol-based autonomy under medical direction
Manage multiple patients simultaneously	Typically manage one patient per encounter unless it is a disaster scenario
Provide shift-based care over 8–12 hours	Provide episodic care during prehospital encounters which usually only last 45-60 minutes
Use SBAR for patient handoff and communication	Use MIST for patient handoff and communication

Lessons identified from Transition

- Adapt clinical reasoning from prehospital protocol-driven care to the nursing process
- Develop confidence in the registered nurse role
- Strengthen patient and family advocacy
- Promote interprofessional collaboration
- Recognize early signs of burnout and occupational stress
- Prioritize professional well-being and self-care
- Support gender diversity within the nursing workforce
- Promote the public health role of emergency nursing

Conclusions and Future Directions

- Continue professional development in emergency nursing practice
- Obtain Certified Emergency Nurse (CEN) certification
- Pursue graduate education in nursing education or advanced clinical practice
- Support mentorship of nursing students
- Promote clinical simulation as a tool for interprofessional education
- Promote increased mental health awareness as part of improved self-care
- Advocate for **paramedic-to-RN educational pathways**, including programs such as Excelsior University and LaGuardia Community College



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