

MEMBER SHOWCASE

Case study



London Ambulance Service 
NHS Trust

Advanced paramedic practitioner programme

London Ambulance Service NHS Trust

The challenge

People who are very seriously ill or injured often need access to senior clinical input, which may encompass additional clinical interventions, decision making, leadership and support. This remains the case regardless of whether the patient is in a hospital or out-of-hospital setting.

With emergency departments under increasing pressure, and a focus on providing care close to home wherever possible, ambulance services have been encouraged to extend and redesign their services. This includes providing extended care to patients who are seriously ill or injured.

What was done

The London Ambulance Service NHS Trust has introduced advanced paramedic practitioners (APPs). These staff are given additional, specialist training, allowing them to enhance the level of care they provide to seriously unwell patients. They are able to carry out advanced airway management,

cardiac ultrasound, and surgical procedures. They can also administer some emergency medications which could previously only be given by doctors.

From the very start of the APP programme, it was identified its success would be dependent on recruiting the right people. APPs need a specific blend of clinical, technical and personal skills, as well as the ability to acquire new knowledge. They have to act as champions for change, engage with internal and external colleagues, and provide high-quality clinical care in situations which are frequently challenging and distressing.

A rigorous selection process was therefore designed. All APPs then completed a Master's level university module in advanced practice alongside in-service training delivered by consultants and other specialists.

When a patient is identified as benefitting from advanced care, an APP is dispatched. The scheme was piloted in 2014 and is now part of standard practice at the trust. Three rapid response cars and the expansion of the team means the service can be offered across London.



The results

Early results suggest high rates of successful resuscitation when APPs respond to cardiac arrest. Data continues to be collected and evaluated.

The APP group continues to build strong relationships with internal and external clinicians. They have already conducted valuable research into pre-hospital treatment of conditions such as cardiac arrest and drug intoxication.

Overcoming barriers

Introducing APPs was a challenge to the traditional culture of ambulance services, which is often 'command and control', with an overriding focus on response times.

It was also necessary to address the concerns of other paramedics, who are often used to working in small teams with a high degree of autonomy. They had to become comfortable with the idea of APPs co-responding to calls which traditionally would have received a standard response. A similar shift was necessary among partner organisations, since the clinical tasks carried out by APPs have usually been performed by senior medical staff.

Recruiting practitioners with high levels of experience and education helped overcome these barriers. So too did creating a 24/7 clinical advice line for APPs, staffed by senior clinicians.

Key learning

- **Engagement with a range of stakeholders is crucial.**
- **The selection process for potential practitioners must be robust, focusing on a combination of technical and non-technical skills.**
- **Clinical and emotional support mechanisms for APPs are vital in promoting sound clinical governance, and maintaining the wellbeing of staff in these roles.**
- **Continuing education and research is a cornerstone of the APP role.**

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