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IPP Editorial – Dr Enrico Dippenaar

### **Paramedicine and the community**

Paramedicine as we know it today is still in its infancy when compared to other healthcare professions. Militaries around the world initiated the profession by training soldiers to be physician (medic) assistants on the battlefield--hence the term paramedic. It is useful and beneficial for any civil society to have trained personnel that can not only transport patients to hospital but deliver medical care outside of a controlled setting. Internationally a variety of healthcare providers perform this role; mostly coming from the nursing profession, but over the last 40 years or so there has been a move to have paramedicine stand on its own. It is evident from the health authorities in the major developed nations that paramedicine has become a distinctly registered and regulated profession; moving to degree education as a minimum standard.

The growth of paramedicine as a profession has not come easy in civil society. In a short time, paramedics had to prove their worth, ability, and safety to practice in the healthcare domain. It was not so long ago when paramedics could do no more than apply basic first aid, using things like oxygen and bandages in the back of an ambulance and rush a patient to hospital. Today we have a myriad of advanced skills and specially trained paramedics that can almost provide the same level of care out-of-hospital than in the emergency room. However, although paramedicine alleviates the pressure on overall healthcare demands, there will always be a need to take patients to hospital for care beyond that a paramedic can provide. There is a lot of emphasis on what paramedics can or cannot do in the out-of-hospital setting, with overwhelming attention on the training and audit required to maintain or broaden their skillset.

Amid all the ground-breaking strides forward, the focus has been mostly on the development of the profession--not always on the needs of the community. Yes, paramedics provide a vital service to our people, but what is it they need from us? It is time to take a step back and re-evaluate our purpose as a profession. Society has changed drastically over the last few decades and we are the most aptly positioned profession to react and adapt to such change. The number of calls emergency services receive are rising at an alarming rate, with so called 'non-emergency' cases being the biggest contributor. Emergency services around the world are struggling to keep up with this growing demand, but still we have a similar response model to that of days gone by.

Paramedics must take a critical look at the purpose and future of the profession. We are there to serve the community and we need to adapt our systems and practice to meet their needs. This is an exciting time to be in or become part of the profession as paramedicine is the cornerstone of our community's resilience.