

# FIRST RESPONDERS - PARAMEDIC FOLLOW UP Q&A



## **James Keating, Halton Paramedic Services**

**What is the difference between primary care paramedics and advanced care paramedics? Is there one of each in every truck?**

In general, Advanced Care Paramedics (ACPs) are authorized to perform more medical procedures and administer more medications than Primary Care Paramedics (PCPs). The exact difference in scope of practice can vary a lot depending upon which base hospital unit you're in. For example, in Halton, our PCP's are authorized to start IV's, administer 11 different medications, defibrillate and perform several other procedures and assessments. Our ACPs are authorized to do everything a PCP can but can also do things like intubation, transcutaneous pacing, cardioversion, administer several other cardiac medications and more. You have to become a PCP before you can become an ACP and it's generally recommended you obtain a few years of experience before you challenge the ACP program.

There is a ton of information on this topic alone and it tends to change year to year. Go to the Ontario Base Hospital Group webpage and the MOHLTC EHS branch website for more information.

[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/emergency\\_health/default.aspx](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/emergency_health/default.aspx)  
<http://www.ontariobasehospitalgroup.ca/>

**How does mental health management play into your job as a first-responder?**

We are supported by our peers and our employer. We have our peer support group, EFAP (emergency family assistance and planning), also our Road to Mental Readiness, Trauma assistance and more. Other than the organizational assistance we receive, we are also encouraged to take a proactive approach to physical and mental health by focusing on our individual physical and mental well-being.

**How many years of schooling and training do you go through to then become a full time paramedic?**

It depends on the college program you choose. In general it takes 2 years in the public college system, 1.5 years (4 semesters straight) for most private colleges, and 3 years for the degree program (UofT/Centennial)

**Is being a paramedic hard? Specifically emotionally because I can imagine that you can see terrible things**

It can be difficult at times, of course. However, your friendships and professional relationships can help build your personal resilience. Also, there are some very rewarding experiences in this career.

**What do you generally deal with on a daily basis?**

The call type varies on a day to day basis but also varies a lot depending on where you work (for example, a big, urban downtown centre like Toronto versus suburban Halton). In Halton, we deal with a variety of medical calls. In the summer, we are faced with more MVCs (motor vehicle collisions). That being said, we have many retirement and long-term care facilities, so we are faced with some very complex medical calls and many senior patients.

**How often do you find yourselves working with other emergency responder services?**

Every day. The fire department is dispatched to a high percentage of our calls – those involving chest pain, shortness of breath, or MVCs and other industrial accidents. We are sometimes on calls with the police for a variety of other public safety situations.

**How physically demanding is being a paramedic?**

It can be quite demanding, specifically on your flexibility, balance and strength. I put it in those terms because you are found in some tricky situations in tight, awkward spaces helping people and lifting them. Perhaps it is carrying them down a winding staircase or lifting someone out of a vehicle. The tricky part is that your cardiovascular system generally isn't as tested on a daily basis, but you could need to use it with no notice. For example, you could be called out to an injured hiker on a trail and have to hike in and out for hours.

**Does volunteering exist for paramedics? If no, then what do you recommend?**

Prior to the pandemic there were a few opportunities, but there are none at the moment. Intermittently check the Halton Region website for updated information closer to summer 2021. There are co-op student opportunities in the logistics department, which are highly beneficial in learning all about our department overall. But if you are interested in applying for paramedic college, volunteer in any way that interests you! especially in team environments where you are helping people. Employers definitely look fondly on those experiences.