Setting Basic Standards in a Developing Ambulance Service:

A qualitative description of the impact of the Intermediate Ambulance Care course on prehospital care practice in Penang, Malaysia

Matthew Perry
Acknowledgement

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Thank you all, I have not done this alone.

Matt Perry.
Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide.

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Matthew J. Perry
Abstract

The Intermediate Ambulance Care (IAC) course is a thirty-week training program run in Penang, Malaysia which was adapted from the South Australian Certificate IV in Ambulance Practice. The adaption of this program was designed and implemented to improve the clinical education of ambulance practitioners in Penang. However, the IAC is not the only course available within Penang or wider Malaysia, which seeks to improve the standard of care within the EMS. The question that remains unresolved is: what has been the impact upon the development of prehospital care as an occupation?

The prehospital care environment in Penang, Malaysia is a complex mix of government and non-government agencies, with variable training standards that lack consistency. Despite its central place in the public health system of many countries, there is little research or other literature available to inform the development of prehospital care education within developing countries. Even within developed systems, such as Australia, there is little evidence available to suggest how a program of education may assist prehospital care professional development.

This research considers the impact of the IAC on the development of prehospital care practice and how the course might have contributed to the development of an emerging profession. The questions in this research centre on what the IAC has achieved within the rapidly changing emergency medical system (EMS) in Penang as well as considering the perceptions of leading professions, such as the medical profession. The study examined the IAC in light of the attributes of a profession as suggested by Greenwood (1984).

A focused ethnography, triangulated with field notes and observational data, was conducted in order to describe the impact and subsequent professional development.
Focused ethnography was selected as the most appropriate methodology as the subject matter of this study was the constructed reality of professionalism and the subjective way in which a professional development course might contribute. As such semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate method for the collection of the primary data.

A total of eleven interviews were conducted and thematically analysed through the process described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The four themes that were identified were: Quality of training and quality of care go hand in hand; how standardisation is managed in Penang; the IAC one course that is assisting the development of a profession; and the management of change. The themes described the way in which the IAC contributed to the development of a distinct profession. Whilst pre-hospital care, as a profession, is yet to establish itself in Malaysia, in countries where it has there have been significant improvements in delivering public health outcomes.

This study sought to describe the impact of the IAC within the complex mix of service and education available, rather than in isolation. As such the study offers an insight into what can be achieved with a developing country's EMS by offering professional education and development.
# Glossary of Terms & Abbreviations

## Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ambulance Practitioner</td>
<td>This thesis uses the term Ambulance Practitioner to describe any person involved in ambulance practice. It encompasses all professional and non-professional groups involved in practice. For example Nurses, Doctors, Assistant Medical Officers can all be described as ambulance practitioners if their role at the time is to respond to emergencies in an ambulance. The term is used here to describe any person involved in ambulance practice and not to differentiate those with independent practice as in other parts of the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambulance Officer</td>
<td>Refers to those who are employed or volunteer within an ambulance service. When a person is not part of another professional group, such as those listed above they are referred to as an Ambulance Officer.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paramedic</td>
<td>Paramedic refers to an ambulance practitioner who is involved in autonomous diagnosis and treatment of common, life threatening conditions. The title Paramedic is sometimes used without definition within literature. There is no internally accepted definition, however in this thesis the term Paramedic will only be used when describing professionals who operate as autonomous practitioners.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Physician  

In Malaysia Medical Doctors are often referred to as Physicians. The term is less common in commonwealth countries than the United States of America.

Abbreviations

AMO  Assistant Medical Officer. AMO's are Diploma trained medical staff who provide limited diagnostic and treatment options under the direction of a Doctor. They were previously referred to as 'Medical Assistants' (MA's) and similar in role to the Physician Assistants in the United States of America.

BAC  Basic Ambulance Care. This is a course originally run by St John Ambulance Malaysia, State of Penang, and was the previous standard for their ambulance medics. The BAC (or versions of it) has been adopted by Red Crescent Penang and Hospital Pulau Pinang to train ambulance practitioners. While not universally accepted, it is seen by many in the industry to be the standard of training currently. It is a 30-hour course. The IAC (a 300 hour course) was designed to build on this.

Bomba  Jabatan Bomba Dan Penyelamat Malaysia is the Government Department responsible for Fire and Rescue services within Malaysia. This is commonly shortened to Bomba.

EP  Emergency Physician. EP’s are specialist Emergency Doctors within the hospital system.

EMS  Emergency Medical Services. EMS refers to all aspects of the emergency medical system, however usually refers to prehospital care. Within this
thesis prehospital care will always be differentiated from the more general term of EMS.

HPP or GH  Hospital Pulau Pinang or the Penang General Hospital is the main public hospital, located in Georgetown, Penang.

IAC  Intermediate Ambulance Care course. This course lies at the centre of this thesis and was developed from a Certificate IV in Health Care (Ambulance) course taught in South Australia. It is delivered in partnership with SJAM Penang and available for any ambulance practitioner from any service to attend.

MCDD/JPAM  Malaysian Civil Defense Department. Also referred to as Jabatan Pertahanan Awam (JPAM)

MRC  The Red Crescent Society of Malaysia. In the context of this thesis all references the ‘MRC’ refers to the Penang chapter of that organization.

NGO  Non government organisation.

RC or MRC  The Malaysian Red Crescent, or Bulan Sabit Merch Malaysia. Part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent organisation.

SA or S.A.  The state of South Australia. It is worth noting that when used in titles of S.A. Ambulance or S.A. Health it is not actually an abbreviation. The official title of those government bodies is not, for example, South Australia Ambulance, it is S.A. Ambulance.

SJAM  St John Ambulance of Malaysia. For the purpose of this thesis, SJAM refers to the St John Ambulance of Malaysia, State of Penang. Where reference is made to the national body the suffix, ‘national’ will be used.
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