

Welcome to the first lesson where we will talk about the scope of practice for EMTs in the context of medical ethics and legal responsibilities. We will also talk about the need for following these legal and medical ethics and how they can benefit you.

So, let's get started.

What is Scope of Practice?

- Refers to legal and ethical considerations
- Talks about roles and responsibilities
- Federal, state, and local laws

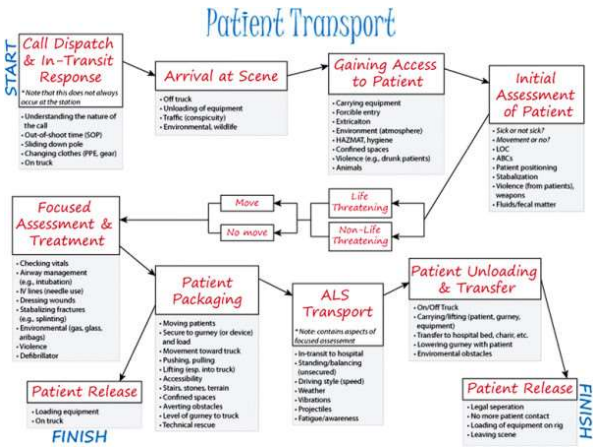


Copyright © MissionCIT, LLC 2020-2021 All Rights Reserved | EMS CARE™ Chapter 03 | Medical Ethics

The scope of practice refers to the legal and ethical considerations that limit the role and responsibilities of an EMT on the job. Often, this scope of practice is determined by the federal, state, and even local laws and procedures that lay out what an EMT can and can't do in terms of skills and procedures.

Basic Principle of Emergency Care

- Begins from the time an EMT is dispatched
- Ends when a patient is handed over to another medical personnel
- Expected to provide best possible care
- Understand the local laws and protocols
- Meeting established standards improves patient outcome and reduces legal risk



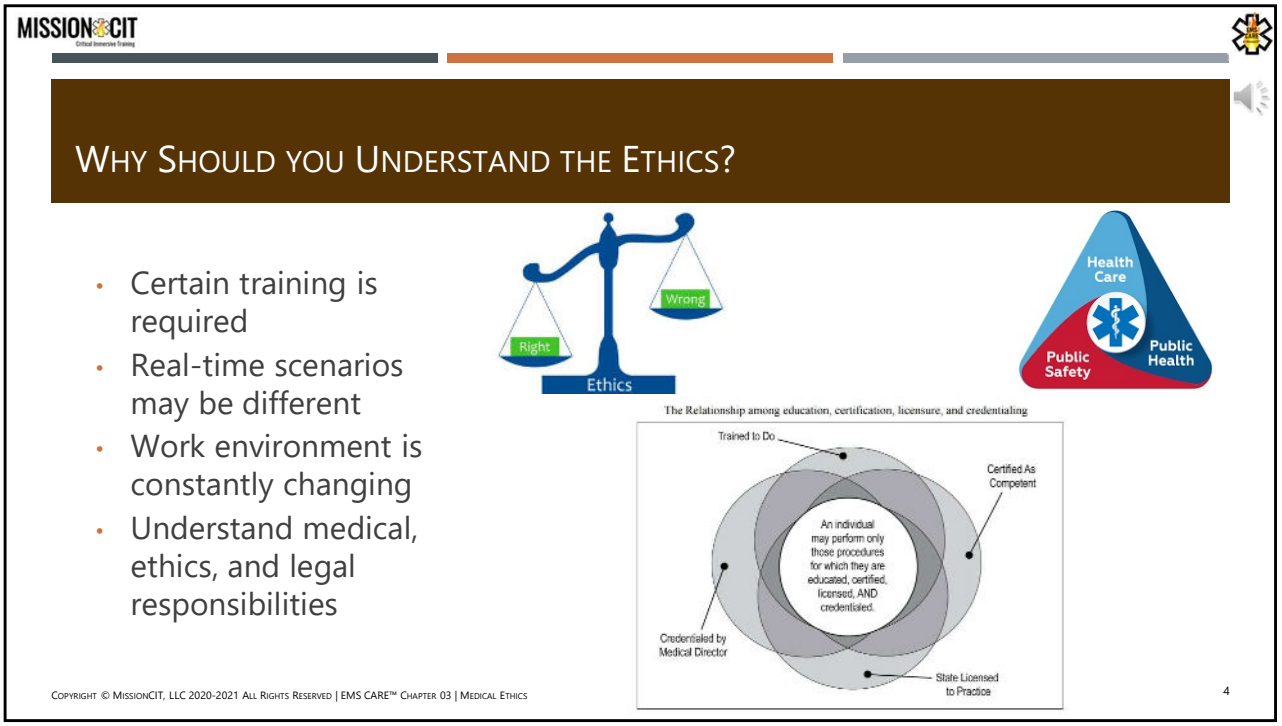
Copyright © MissionCIT, LLC 2020-2021 All Rights Reserved | EMS CARE™ Chapter 03 | Medical Ethics

3

The scope of practice for EMTs is limited to prehospital care and begins from the time an EMT is dispatched to handle a patient and ends when the care of that patient is handed to another medical personnel such as paramedics, nurses, or doctors.

During this time, you're expected to provide the best possible care for the patient to reduce the possibility of mortality or morbidity. That said, the actions that you can take are limited, so make sure you understand the local laws and protocols before providing a specific course of treatment.

Understanding and meeting the established standards of care not only improve the outcome for the patient but also reduces the risk of legal action for you.



The scope of practice is limited for EMTs, hence the educational requirements are shorter. Most times, EMTs are required to have certain hours of training followed by hands-on experience on how to handle patients across different and many times, unique scenarios.

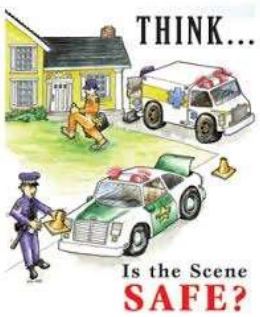
But remember, real-time scenarios may not be exactly what's taught in the classroom, so adapt according to the needs of the patients while keeping in mind your responsibilities and local laws.

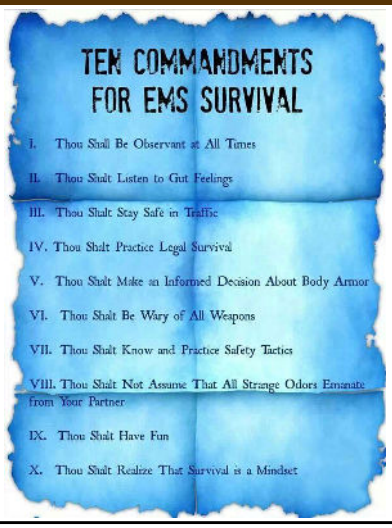
Also, remember your job is either on the field or in the ambulance, and hence can be unfamiliar, variable, and

constantly changing. So, it’s important that you know the medical ethics, legal responsibilities, and your scope of work.

Work Environment, Safety, and Truth

- Work environment is not always safe
- Safety of self and partner is important
- Many dilemmas





Copyright © MissionCIT, LLC 2020-2021 All Rights Reserved | EMS CARE™ Chapter 03 | Medical Ethics

5

Your work may not always be in a safe environment. Many times, you're called to a scene of injury where there's a possibility of encountering a violent person or someone suffering from mental issues. Other times, you'll have to handle road accidents, cases involving meth labs, abuses, and more. None of these qualify as safe situations, so understand the risks thoroughly before you start treatment.

Your safety and that of your partners take precedence over everything else, so ensure that you take the help of law enforcement when needed. If in doubt, call for help,

and never do anything that is outside your legal responsibilities.

Moving on, what about saying the truth? Should you be open and tell everything to the patient or should you conceal it for the time being? This is a dilemma, and the answer depends on the situation.

For example, let’s take the scenario described by an author called Klugman. A man in his 80s has been in a motor vehicle collision and you assess him as someone requiring immediate transport. He is bleeding but conscious. His wife, who was in the passenger seat is dead and the senior is not aware of it. Without worrying about his condition, he is constantly asking about his wife. Will you tell him the truth? Think about it.



As an EMT, your work is time-sensitive and protocol-driven. You must assess a patient and decide the next course of treatment – all within a few minutes. Within this narrow constraint, you have to also consider medical and legal ethics, so being familiar with these ethics, and continuously implementing them in your work is important. Such regular practice will help you to provide the appropriate care and limit legal and ethical violations for you.

Let's see a real-life scenario. You are dispatched to a senior living home where a patient has fallen

unconscious. He was discharged from the hospital last week and has an advance copy and a Do-Not-Resuscitate order from his hospitalization. But he doesn't have an out-of-hospital DNR. What do you do? Will you respect the patient's wishes to not resuscitate or follow your protocol and resuscitate? Remember, you have only a few seconds to make this call.

The answer is, you must resuscitate because the patient doesn't have an out-of-hospital DNR order and in such end-of-life situations, you can save yourself from trouble and possibly the life of the patient by following the protocols.

In short, following the established protocols is necessary as they can guide you to make the right decisions to improve patient outcomes.

On this note, we end this lesson and Justin will take you through the medical code of ethics formulated by the American Medical Association.