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## Committee on Accreditation

of Educational Programs for the EMS Professions

### *What is a Consortium Anyway?*

*by Patricia L. Tritt, RN, MA*

Your paramedic program wants to become accredited. Or you are preparing for re-accreditation and you are reviewing the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) *Standards*. You ponder the sponsorship options and evaluate the topic of consortium and wonder if it applies to your program. What is a consortium anyway? For the purposes of education, a consortium is generally considered an association of two (2) or more organizations with the objective of participating in a common activity or pooling their resources to achieve a common goal. Merriam-Webster defines consortium as “an agreement, combination, or group formed to undertake an enterprise beyond the resources of any one member.” The Latin root means ‘partnership or association’.

The official CAAHEP definition of a consortium sponsor, as described in *Standard I.B.* is, “an entity consisting of two or more members that exists for the purpose of operating an educational program”. The Standard further states that “at least one (1) of the members of the consortium must meet the requirements of a sponsoring educational institution” as described earlier in the document. So what is required to be a sponsor? The options have expanded in recent years to better accommodate the varied needs of paramedic education programs. However, in the final analysis, the sponsor must be accredited to provide postsecondary education by an authority/organization approved by the US Department of Education. Confused yet? The underlying principle is the goal of quality education. How is the student assured that the program he or she attends can provide a consistent, fair, and sound education in their chosen field? One mechanism is accreditation: not just *program* accreditation, but *institutional* accreditation. Various regional and national accrediting organizations review and approve *institutions*. And these organizations are in turn approved by the US Department of Education (USDOE). It is, in essence, a system of checks and balances. For example, Paramedic educational programs are reviewed by the Committee on Accreditation of Educational Programs for the EMS Professions (CoAEMSP) which makes accreditation recommendations to the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP). This is the organization that awards the programmatic accreditation. CAAHEP also periodically reviews and evaluates CoAEMSP, as they do all other Committees on Accreditation that are part of the CAAHEP system. CAAHEP is reviewed and evaluated by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation ([CHEA](#)). See how this works? If you are wondering if the organization or organizations that sponsor your

program are approved providers of postsecondary education, go to the US Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education database [here](#). You can search by state or institution name.

So we return to the topic of consortium. Why would a program choose to develop a consortium with at least two (2) partners? There are several possible scenarios. First, perhaps your program does not meet the requirements as a sponsor and is not approved as a provider of postsecondary education as just described. One option is developing a partnership/consortium with a local college or hospital that already has appropriate institutional accreditation. The benefits can, and should, go beyond obtaining the necessary organizational name on a piece of paper. For example, a partnership with a college can offer a diverse range of student services, educational infrastructure and programs, faculty development, and other resources that can enrich your program, your faculty, and the student experience. A partnership with a hospital can offer a rich array of additional clinical resources and access to additional medical equipment and experienced medical instructional personnel.

A second reason may be the spirit of cooperation in a community when programs want to join together to provide a diverse experience for the students and provide the broadest possible educational experience. In addition to the college – hospital partnership already mentioned, there are a variety of combinations of partners: two or more hospitals; a college and an EMS agency or fire service; a private educational program and a college or hospital, etcetera.

However the consortium is formed, the key ingredient is that the *consortium* operates the program with a separate board established to run the education program. The governance, lines of authority, and the roles of each partner must be established in an agreement and there must be an organizational chart. To repeat, the *consortium board runs the program*, not a single partner. To embark on a consortium all parties must be open to these terms. Consortium operation must be documented in a formal contract, agreement or memorandum of understanding. Sample documents are available [here](#). The consortium approach has the potential to bring more depth, more resources, and a broader base to your educational program which in turn can lead to a higher quality education for the students and a more competent graduate.

So isn't a consortium the same as having an articulation agreement with an institution accredited by a recognized sponsor? Well no. An articulation agreement typically refers to a written agreement with an institution that is authorized to provide college credit to individuals completing the educational program. Credit is provided to those students who desire it, not necessarily all students. The college partner awards credit but is not necessarily involved in the operation of the education program.

The concepts involved are important and are part of the core structure or foundation of the program. The operation, ownership, or other core elements of a paramedic program may change and evolve over time and the individuals responsible for the program must stay abreast of the current accreditation requirements. If you have questions about the

structure of your program, how to find more information on approved postsecondary education resources, or how to develop a consortium, contact the CoAEMSP Executive Director at 817.330.0080 Ext. 112 or [george@coaemsp.org](mailto:george@coaemsp.org).

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