

# Non-Recertifying Paramedic Survey Preliminary Report

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**Purpose:**

To identify the reasons paramedics do not recertify in West Virginia.

**Methodology:**

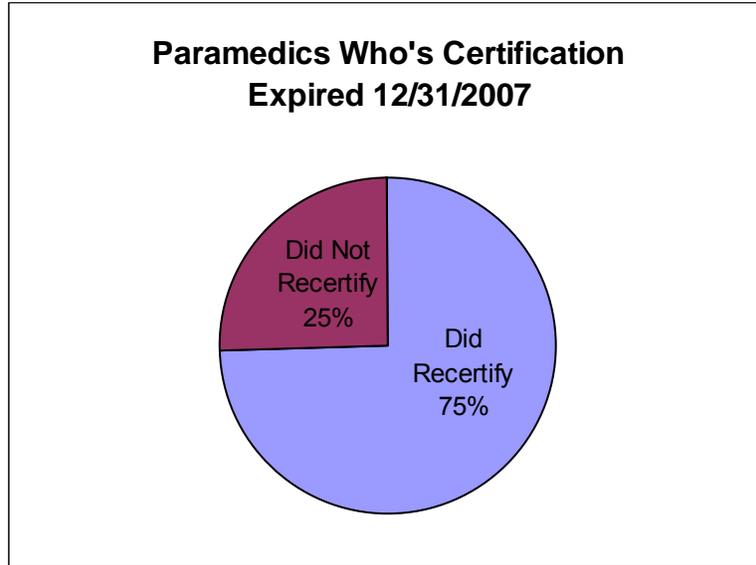
In February 2008, the West Virginia Office of Emergency Medical Services (WVOEMS) initiated a project to attempt to quantify the number of Paramedics leaving emergency medical services in West Virginia and to establish why they were leaving the field. A survey was used as the primary method of investigation. The target audience for the survey was Paramedics whose certification expired December 31, 2007, and who had not recertified as of February 1, 2008. The primary method for collecting the survey data was a webpage and a paper form (Appendix A). The procedures were as follows:

- 1) On February 1, 2008, the five WV TSN Regional Offices (a contractor for WVOEMS) were given a list of Paramedics who had not recertified from their regions.
- 2) On receipt of the survey candidate list, TSN field staff were to begin contacting each person by phone. During this phone contact, TSN field staff were to inform the candidate of the survey, provide the candidate with the WEB location, and encourage them to participate.
- 3) Should the candidate be reluctant or unable to complete the WEB form, TSN field staff was to offer to read the question to the candidate and to complete the WEB form for them.
- 4) The West Virginia Office of Emergency Medical Services was to provide frequent updates to TSN field staff as to the participation in the survey. TSN field staff were to use the updates to perform follow-up contacts of those not participating. Multiple attempts were made to obtain phone or current mail contact with each person.
- 5) On February 16, 2008, TSN field staff were to mail paper copies of the survey with self-addressed stamped envelopes to individuals who had not completed the survey.
- 6) The survey was closed on February 25 at noon.

**Demographics of Target Population:**

**Expiring Paramedics:**

**Table 1**



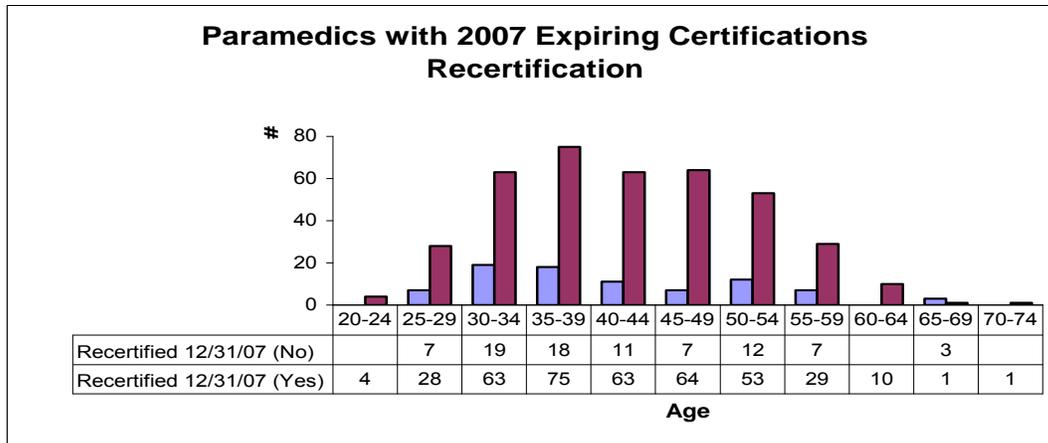
<b>Expiring Paramedic Certifications</b>	<b>Did Recertify</b>	<b>Did Not Recertify</b>
475	354	121

There were 475 West Virginia Paramedics whose certifications expired December 31, 2007 (Table 1). Of that number, 121 (25%) had not recertified as of February 1, 2008. Of the 121 Paramedics who had not recertified as of February 1, 2008, 37 had completed at least some of the required continuing education or necessary paperwork to recertify and were, therefore, eliminated as candidates for the survey. Of the remaining 85 candidates, 32 completed the survey.

**Age:**

Table 2 shows the age distribution of Paramedics expiring 12/31/08. The mean age of Paramedics whose certification expired December 31, 2007 and who did recertify was 42.5. The mean age of Paramedics whose certification expired December 31, 2007 and who did not recertify was 42.1. A t-test run against the two populations indicated that the average age of those recertifying was not significantly different from the average age of those who did not recertify.

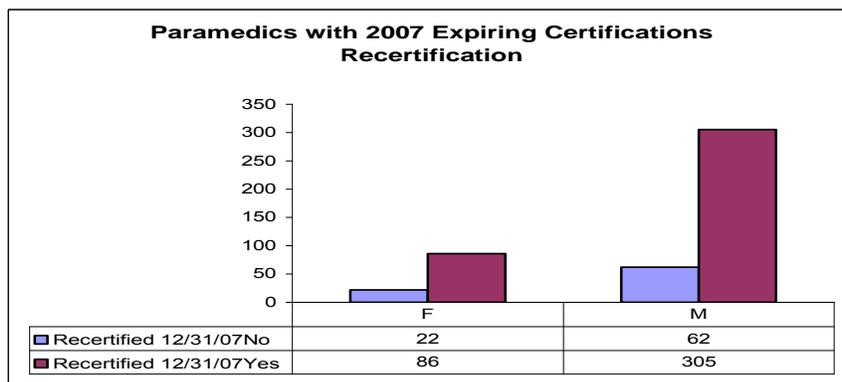
**Table 2**



**Sex:**

Females comprised 26.2% of those who did not recertify and 22% of those who did recertify (Table 3). Males comprised 73.9% of those who did not recertify and 78% of those who did recertify. A Chi Square run against the two populations indicated that the gender of those who did recertify did not significantly differ (at the .05 level) from the gender of those who did not recertify.

**Table 3**



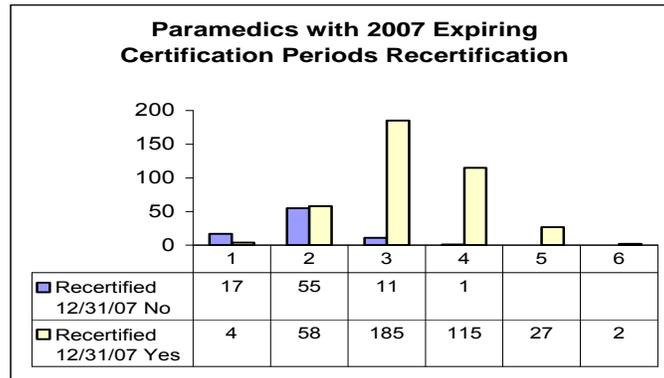
**Length of Certification:**

The number of expiring certification periods is used as an indicator of length of service (although not necessarily cross-related on number of years of service). The distribution of certification periods is shown in Table 4.

The mode of “number of expiring certifications” for Paramedics who did not recertify by December 31, 2007 is 2, and the mean is 2. The mode of “number of expiring certifications” for Paramedics who did recertify by December 31, 2007 is 3, and the mean is 3.3.

While 86% of all Paramedics who did not recertify had one or two different expired certification periods, only 16% of these who did recertify had one or two different expired certification periods.

**Table 4**



## **Findings:**

Expiring paramedics were asked to identify whether they worked for pay, volunteered or did both in the last 12 months. Fourteen (44%) indicated they did none of the above. See specific question results in Appendix B.1.

Respondents were asked if they had provided direct patient care in an ambulance on a regular basis during the last 12 months. Twenty-one of 32, (66%) had not provided direct care in the previous year. See specific question results in Appendix B.2.

Determining factors that influenced expiring paramedics' decision to not recertify was the major focus of this survey. Twenty-six potentially influencing factors were listed. Each respondent was to rate the influence of each on a five-point scale ranging from "Extremely Important" to "Not Important". The list of reasons, ranked by importance, is in Appendix C.

The single most important reason paramedics participating in this survey did not recertify was "family obligations". The remaining top five reasons in descending order were "limited career ladder", "availability of continuing education", "rate of pay" and "seeking educational opportunity". Specific response data on the top five cited reasons are contained in Appendix D.

A popular notion is that paramedics leave field EMS to become RNs. The survey found that 13 respondents (41%) indicated that they were seeking another career in healthcare. Of the number seeking another healthcare career, five (38%) indicated they were pursuing an RN degree. Each other career listed (eight) only had one selection each. Those ranged from Dentist to Respiratory Therapist. A large number of those leaving in 2007 were indeed going "higher" in the healthcare field.

Additionally, respondents were given the opportunity to give free form comments and suggestions. Many of those comments revolved around recertification requirements. Specific comments are contained in Appendix E.

## **Discussion:**

The reasons paramedics leave EMS has long been a subject of conjecture. This survey is the second attempt to begin determining those reasons. If we can discover the common reasons, we may be able to develop strategies to retain EMS personnel.

The fact that over half of the respondents had not provided direct patient care within the last year lends more importance to the question of how many paramedics actually practice. We cannot accurately determine this at present.

The reality is, almost all of the factors that influence an individual paramedic to leave EMS are interdependent. However, for retention management purposes, the reasons paramedics do not recertify was categorized by cause responsibility. This categorization reveals three main responsible parties: the individual, the EMS agency, and state requirements.

The majority of the reasons appear to be of a purely personal nature. It appears that most people chose to leave for reasons that cannot be addressed directly by EMS agencies or the state. It will take several years of repeated surveys to determine the normal, and thus acceptable, rate of attrition that cannot be controlled by the EMS system.

Agency specific factors are second in number. Those factors are: rate of pay, lack of benefits, lack of retirement plan, limited career ladder, dissatisfaction with EMS agency, EMS work schedule, and physical demands of EMS work. These factors, while mostly under the direct control of the EMS agency, are complex. Reimbursement and other external factors impact agency ability to improve these factors. EMS agencies need to critically examine operations to make the most of opportunities to retain personnel.

Six factors appear to be best addressed by the state. They are: lack of professional recognition, availability of refresher course, amount of hours required, availability of continuing education, taking written examination, and taking practical examination. Addressing these will require changes in philosophy, funding, statute, and legislative rule.

## **Limitations:**

The survey only represents those paramedics who chose to leave EMS in 2007. Also, the response percentage (38%) was small. Additionally, there appears to be an age bias in that respondents were older than the entire cohort. Repeated surveys will be required to determine trends.

**Conclusions:**

Given the limitations, this survey represents the best evidence we have as to why paramedics leave EMS. It gives us starting points for discussion of systemic issues that impact paramedic retention. Wholesale philosophical and legislative changes should not be based on these results.

However, the EMS system must listen to what it does say and make adjustments to improve the likelihood of paramedic retention. It is apparent that the EMS workforce is transient. We must accept this and provide the maximum ease and benefits for personnel during their time in EMS.

**Appendix A - The Survey**



**Non-Recertifying Paramedic Survey – 2008**

WV Certification Number: \_\_\_\_\_

1. In the last 12 months, did you:
  - A. Work as a paramedic for pay? Ⓢ
  - B. Volunteer as a paramedic? Ⓢ
  - C. Did both, worked as a paramedic for pay and also as a volunteer? Ⓢ
  - D. None of the above. Ⓢ
  
2. In the last 12 months did you provide direct patient care in an ambulance on a regular basis?
  - Yes Ⓢ
  - No Ⓢ

3. According to our records, you did not apply for paramedic recertification. How important were each of the following in your decision NOT to apply for recertification?

	Extremely Important	Very Important	Moderately Important	Slightly Important	Not Important
A. Rate of pay.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
B. Family obligations.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
C. Lack of benefits.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
D. Military obligations.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
E. Lack of retirement plan.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
F. Limited career ladder.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
G. Dissatisfied with coworkers.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
H. Moved out of state.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I. Not satisfied with EMS work.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
J. No opportunity to practice where I live.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
K. Retired from EMS.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
L. Lack of professional recognition.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
M. Lack of time to devote to EMS.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
N. Occupational disability from EMS.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
O. Personal health issues.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
P. Dissatisfied with EMS agency.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Q. Seeking educational opportunity.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
R. EMS work schedule.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
S. Physical demands of EMS work.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
T. Availability of refresher course.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
U. Amount of hours required.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
V. Availability of continuing education.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
W. Taking written examination.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
X. Taking practical examination.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Y. Forgot my certification was expiring.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Z. Did not know how to recertify.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

3. What other factors, if any, influenced your decision about recertification? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Are you actively seeking another career in health care?

Yes  --> IF YES, Please answer question 4a.

No

4a. Which of the following health care careers are you actively pursuing? PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.

Nursing (RN)

Physician Assistant

Physician

Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)  \_\_\_\_\_

5. (OPTIONAL) Please provide us with any other comments or suggestions about paramedic recertification that you feel would be helpful: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

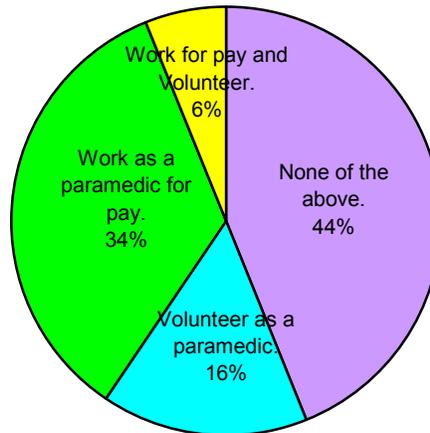
## Appendix B1 – Question 1.

In the last twelve months, did you:

- A. Work as a paramedic for pay?
- B. Volunteer as a paramedic?
- C. Did both, worked as a paramedic for pay and also as a volunteer?
- D. None of the above.

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Work as a Paramedic for Pay	11	34.4	34.4
	Volunteer as a Paramedic	5	15.6	50.0
	Did Both	2	6.3	56.3
	None of the Above	14	43.8	100.0
	Total	32	100.0	

**In the Last 12 Months, Did You:**



The greatest number (14) of non-recertifying Paramedics had not worked for pay or as a volunteer in the last twelve months. A slightly smaller number of respondents (13) indicated that they worked for pay (eleven for pay only and two both for pay and volunteer).

**Appendix B2 – Question 2.**

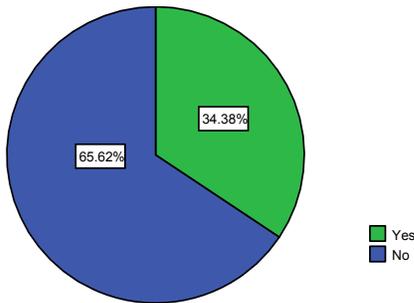
In the last twelve months did you provide direct patient care in an ambulance on a regular basis?

- Yes   
 No

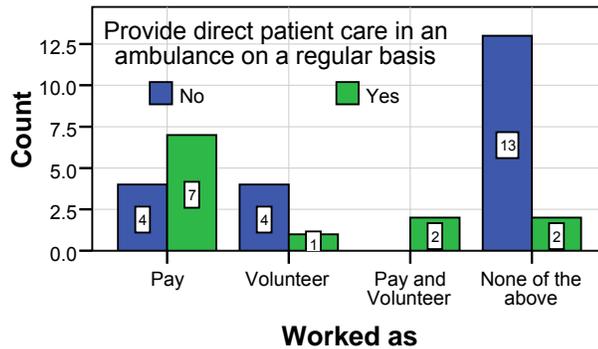
Provide direct patient care in an ambulance on a regular basis			
	No	Yes	Total
Frequency	21	11	32
Percent	65.6	34.4	100
Cumulative Percent	65.6	100	

Provide direct patient care in an ambulance on a regular basis			
	No	Yes	Total
Pay	4	7	11
Volunteer	4	1	5
Pay and Volunteer	0	2	2
None of the above	13	2	15
Total	21	12	33

**Provide Direct Patient Care**



**Bar Chart**



The greatest number of non-recertifying Paramedics did not provide direct patient care in the last twelve months.

### Appendix C – Question 3.

The major focus of the survey was found in Question 3. This question asked how important each of the 26 items was in the decision not to apply for recertification. The survey respondent was to gage the importance of each item on a five-point scale: 1) Not Important, 2) Slightly Important, 3) Moderately Important, 4) Very Important, and 5) Extremely Important.

**Table 5**

	Mean	% Extremely Important	% Not Important
Family Obligations	3.00	31.3	37.5
Limited Career Ladder	2.66	25	43.8
Availability of Continuing Education	2.63	15.6	46.9
Rate of Pay	2.56	28.1	50
Seeking Educational Opportunity	2.53	28.1	53.1
Amount of Hours Required	2.50	21.9	50
Availability of Refresher Course	2.47	21.9	50
Dissatisfied with EMS Agency	2.44	21.9	56.3
Lack of Retirement Plan	2.41	12.5	50
Lack of Benefits	2.31	15.6	56.3
Lack of Professional Recognition	2.13	9.4	56.3
Taking Written Examination	2.03	15.6	65.6
EMS Work Schedule	2.03	15.6	62.5
Dissatisfied with Coworkers	2.03	15.6	62.5
Moved Out-of-State	2.00	25	75
Lack of Time to Devote to EMS	1.91	12.5	50
Taking Practical Examination	1.91	15.6	71.9
Retired from EMS	1.72	15.6	81.3
Personal Health Issues	1.69	9.4	87.5
Physical Demands of EMS Work	1.66	6.3	75
Did Not Know How to Recertify	1.53	9.4	81.3
Not Satisfied with EMS Work	1.47	3.1	75
Occupational Disability from EMS	1.34	3.1	87.5
No Opportunity to Practice Where I Live	1.34	6.3	87.5
Military Obligations	1.03	0	96.9
Forgot My Certification was Expiring	1.00	0	100

The single most “Important” reason for not reapplying was “Family Obligations” followed by “Limited Career Ladder”, “Availability of Continuing Education”, “Rate of Pay”, and “Seeking Educational Opportunity.” The least important reason was “Forgot My Certification was Expiring” followed by “Military Obligations”, “No Opportunity to Practice Where I Live”, “Occupational Disability from EMS”, and “Not Satisfied with EMS Work.”

### Appendix C – Question 3 (continued)

The dichotomy of answers is also of interest:

- 1) Ten persons (31%) said that “Family Obligations was “Extremely” Important while twelve persons (38%) said that it was “Not” Important (extremes total 69%).
- 2) Nine persons (28%) said “Seeking Educational Opportunity” was “Extremely” Important while 17 (53%) said it was “Not” Important (extreme total 81%).
- 3) Nine persons (or 28%) said that “Pay Rate” was “Extremely” Important while 16 persons (or 50%) said it was “Not” Important (extreme total 78%).

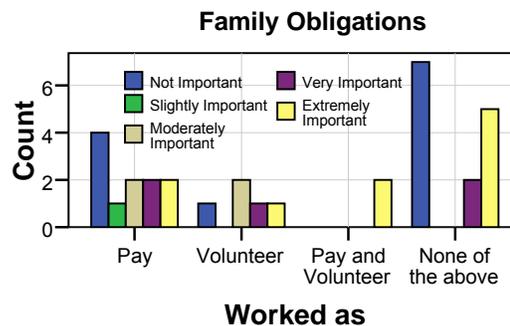
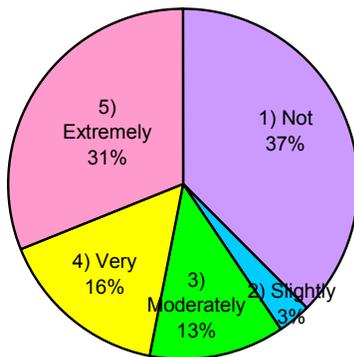
## Appendix D1 - Family Obligations

3. According to our records, you did not apply for paramedic recertification. How important were each of the following in your decision NOT to apply for recertification?

B. Family obligations  Extremely Important  Very Important  Moderately Important  Slightly Important  Not Important

	Not Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Very Important	Extremely Important	Total
Frequency	12	1	4	5	10	32
Percent	37.5	3.1	12.5	15.6	31.3	100
Cumulative Percent	37.5	3.1	12.5	15.6	31.3	

**Family Obligations**



	Not Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Very Important	Extremely Important	Total
Pay	4	1	2	2	2	11
Volunteer	1	0	2	1	1	5
Pay and Volunteer	0	0	0	0	2	2
None of the Above	7	0	0	2	6	15
Total	12	1	4	5	11	33

“Family Obligations” was one of three times where more than 50% or more of the respondents said it was important (with “Limited Career Ladder” and “Availability of Continuing Education” being the other two). “Family Obligations” were not important to a little more than one-third of the non-recertifying Paramedics (twelve or 37%) and extremely to another third (ten or 32.3%).

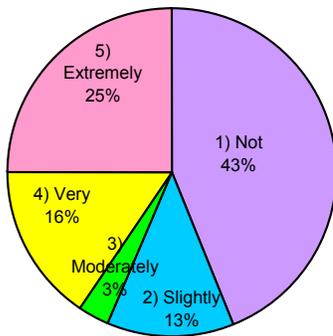
## Appendix D2 - Limited Career Ladder

3. According to our records, you did not apply for paramedic recertification. How important were each of the following in your decision NOT to apply for recertification?

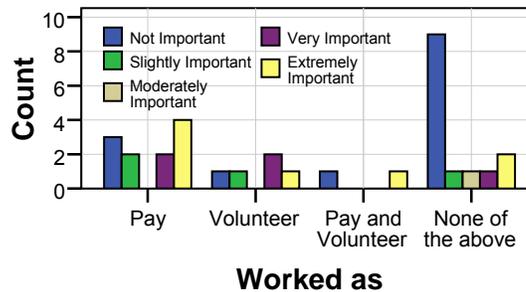
F. Limited career ladder  Extremely Important  Very Important  Moderately Important  Slightly Important  Not Important

	Not Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Very Important	Extremely Important	Total
Frequency	14	4	1	5	8	32
Percent	43.8	12.5	3.1	15.6	25	100
Cumulative Percent	43.8	56.3	59.4	75	100	

Limited Career Ladder



Limited Career Ladder



	Not Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Very Important	Extremely Important	Total
Pay	3	2	0	2	4	11
Volunteer	1	1	0	2	1	5
Pay and Volunteer	1	0	0	0	1	2
None of the Above	10	1	1	1	2	15
Total	15	4	1	5	8	33

“Limited Career Ladder” was one of three times where more than 50% of the people surveyed said it was of some importance (with “Family Obligations” and “Availability of Continuing Education” being the other two).

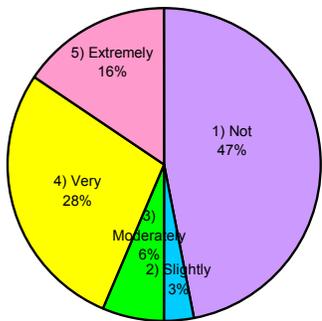
## Appendix D3 - Availability of Continuing Education

3. According to our records, you did not apply for paramedic recertification. How important were each of the following in your decision NOT to apply for recertification?

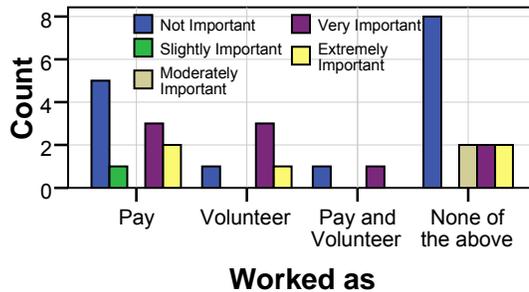
V. Availability of continuing education  Extremely Important  Very Important  Moderately Important  Slightly Important  Not Important

	Not Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Very Important	Extremely Important	Total
Frequency	15	1	2	9	5	32
Percent	46.9	3.1	6.3	28.1	15.6	100
Cumulative Percent	46.9	50	56.3	84.4	100	

Continuing Education



Availability of Continunig Education



	Not Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Very Important	Extremely Important	Total
Pay	5	1	0	3	2	11
Volunteer	1	0	0	3	1	5
Pay and Volunteer	1	0	0	1	0	2
None of the Above	8	0	3	2	2	15
Total	15	1	3	9	5	33

“Availability of Continuing Education” was one of three times where more than 50% of the people surveyed said it was of some importance (with “Family Obligations” and Limited Career Ladder being the other two).

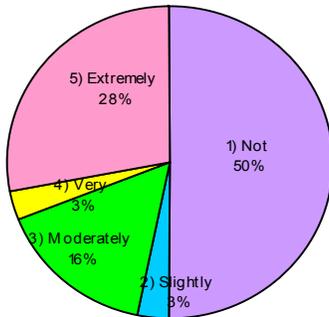
## Appendix D4 - Rate of Pay

3a. According to our records, you did not apply for paramedic recertification. How important were each of the following in your decision NOT to apply for recertification?

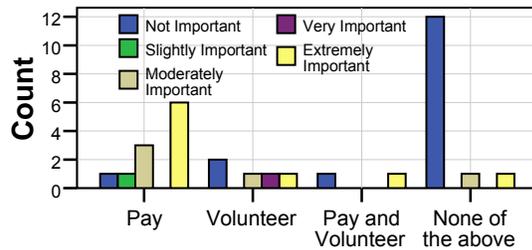
	Extremely Important	Very Important	Moderately Important	Slightly Important	Not Important
A. Rate of pay	<input type="checkbox"/>				

	Not Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Very Important	Extremely Important	Total
Frequency	16	1	5	1	9	32
Percent	50	3.1	15.6	3.1	28.1	100
Cumulative Percent	50	53.1	68.8	71.9	100	

**Pay Rate**



**Rate of Pay**



**Worked as**

	Not Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Very Important	Extremely Important	Total
Pay	1	1	3	0	6	11
Volunteer	2	0	1	1	1	5
Pay and Volunteer	1	0	0	0	1	2
None of the Above	13	0	1	0	1	15
Total	17	1	5	1	9	33

While 53.1 percent of the non-recertifying Paramedics consider Pay to be not or only slightly important, slightly less than one-third of them consider Pay to be very or extremely important.

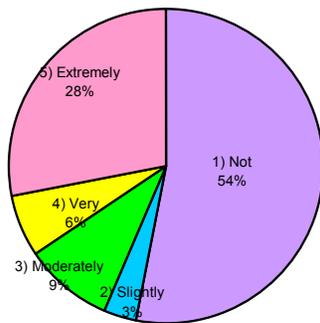
## Appendix D5 - Seeking Educational Opportunity

3. According to our records, you did not apply for paramedic recertification. How important were each of the following in your decision NOT to apply for recertification?

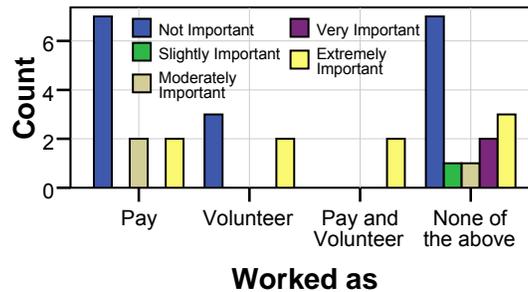
	Extremely Important	Very Important	Moderately Important	Slightly Important	Not Important
Q. Seeking educational opportunity	<input type="checkbox"/>				

	Not Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Very Important	Extremely Important	Total
Frequency	17	1	3	2	9	32
Percent	53.1	3.1	9.4	6.3	28.1	100
Cumulative Percent	53.1	56.3	65.6	71.9	100	

### Seeking Educational Opportunity



### Seeking Educational Opportunity



	Not Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Very Important	Extremely Important	Total
Pay	7	0	2	0	2	11
Volunteer	3	0	0	0	2	5
Pay and Volunteer	0	0	0	0	2	2
None of the Above	8	1	1	2	3	15
Total	18	1	3	2	9	33

## Appendix E – Question 5.

(OPTIONAL) Please provide us with any other comments or suggestions about paramedic recertification that you feel would be helpful:

- ♦ 21 Respondents

### Open-Ended Response Classification (Multiple Responses per Person):

- 1) I did not realize that I could recertify.
- 2) I've only noticed that it takes more CE's to complete the state recertification than it does for the National Registry.
- 3) Pt's don't fit into the "box".
- 4) I am older now and the ER is a more controlled setting.
- 5) The squad drove the volunteers away.
- 6) Demands for becoming and maintaining your paramedic status has become quite difficult.
- 7) I feel you have discarded some of us who still have much to offer.
- 8) Recertification requirement for paramedics are antiquated especially when compared to those of other health professions.
- 9) Other states...have more flexible recertification/re-licensing programs.
- 10) WV seems to have a serious problem with the provision of primary EMS training, particularly at the paramedic level.

### Suggestions:

- 1) Recertification should be easier.
- 2) Make classes for recertification more easily to obtain.
- 3) More classes.
- 4) Study guides for written test would be helpful.
- 5) If I could have gone inactive, I would have.
- 6) Send out recertification packets again.
- 7) Do not allow existing EMS Services to be taken over by Fire Departments.
- 8) After so many years of full time experience and recertification, the requirements could be relaxed.
- 9) EMT-P should be a licensed position.
- 10) Provide training solely for pre-hospital care personnel at a time and cost convenient for them.
- 11) Recognize other states' refresher courses.
- 12) Consider bending your strict rules.
- 13) Offer the opportunity to complete EMS/Paramedic training as a part of the state's vocational-technical high school curriculum.