

EDUCATOR UPDATE

National Association of EMS Educators



April/May 2006

Who's Cheating Now?

Jimm Murray, NREMT

One person sitting in the exam room is a cheater. He or she is using an unfair and unethical method of gaining an advantage for him/herself—and maybe even his/her friends. He/she is cheating at the expense of 98% of the class that believes in honesty and integrity.

You may have experienced this scenario yourself. Somebody in one of your classes cheated on a test that you worked very hard to pass. Most likely, you felt dejected and frustrated. It wasn't fair to you and your friends who did not cheat, was it?

Catching the cheaters hasn't always been easy, however. It could be the young 20-something kid who looks normal enough—except he is wearing long sleeves on a fairly hot day. Or the matronly-looking woman who plans to work for one of the small volunteer ambulance services located just outside of town. It could even be the nerdish-looking guy wearing black-rimmed glasses who always volunteered his opinion in class far too often. There are plenty more in the room who could be suspect to swapping studying and education for cheating on their final written exam—at the expense of the honest people in the class.

Perhaps it was simpler for teachers and class test monitors to catch cheaters before modern technology. They looked for words scribbled on the palms and backs of hands, or a small note that unfolded like an accordion when tucked under a watchband. Then test developers and educators had to start worrying about the person who took the exam and brought questions back to their group of “associate” who had yet to test. As “talented” individuals, they had excellent recall, a photographic memory, or they devised their own unique code for retaining as much as 20% of the answers on the test.

To try to beat them at their game, test developers came up with strategies such as distributing a new series of test booklets at shorter intervals, or mixing up the exams so that half of a class took series “A” and the other half took series “B”.

Did all of these measures put the issue of cheating to rest? Unfortunately, no. The dishonest will always find ways to “beat the system”. Today, modern

technology may serve as a great tool, but it also provides dishonest people with new ways to cheat. According to an article appearing on macon.com, a website of the Macon, Georgia newspaper *The Telegraph*, cheating can take place by cell phone with text messaging, emailing, or coded rings to share answers.

In addition to cell phones, blogs are being used to share test answers. Miniature cameras, with lenses no larger than the end of a ballpoint pen cartridge have also been inconspicuously placed in objects such as a baseball cap or woman's decorative pin—and take photos of exam questions. Wireless microphones have been developed that are so small they can be tucked out of sight, yet transmit up to 1,500 feet away. By appearing to “whisper” to himself, a test taker can record or transmit answers to a remote recorder or to another person taking the test. Scanners also exist in what appear to be ordinary pens, and can take a picture of an entire test sheet. Once too expensive for the average person—and not even available to the general public—this “sleuthing software” is now accessible on a myriad of websites, often for less than the cost of a good MP3 player. Maybe one of the most blatant methods of cheating is websites that provide questions and answers to certification tests. One particular website actually produced a press release announcing a new document containing nearly 600 “correct” questions and answers for certain exams. The website markets this blatant cheating as a “study resource” that provides a “successful” way to prepare for exams.

Colleges and universities recognize the trend to use technology for cheating, and are coming up with policies to address the issue. An article appearing in the Rochester *Democrat & Chronicle* states that the State University College at Brockport has adopted policies including possible charges of cheating if a student “has a cell phone or PDA with photo or video capabilities in hand during a test or exam...” As for websites offering questions and answers to test questions, Caveon, a test security firm, is working to maintain the integrity of high stakes tests by developing a new security initiative to address this unethical trend.

Even though cheating has always existed in some form in every system, it is possibly more of an issue today than it was 25 years ago due to the changing culture. An article titled "Surrounded by cheaters" appearing in the *Times Leader*, a northeastern Pennsylvania publication, suggests that cheating has become more accepted in our society. "Students don't see a problem with cheating because they think everyone does it," the article states. The article suggests that "It's possible that students and people everywhere don't see a problem with cheating because society and media have exposed it and made it seem justifiable."

The challenge of the EMS industry as societal changes occur may be how to keep the incompetent cheater from working on an injured citizen in their greatest time of need.

Just as we don't want our policy to be outgunned by the criminal element, we don't want the safety of the public to be outgunned by the few who cheat to get what they want—because in the end, it's the public that loses.

While the real focus of the National Registry going to computer based testing (CBT) in the adaptive format, in my opinion, is fairness to the candidate, keeping the test secure is equally as important. Without giving away the secrets of our testing vendor, suffice it to say that most of the methods

I've discussed for cheating won't be possible. This new method of testing is an example of how technology can be used for the good of the EMS profession, and ultimately, for the good of the public. There will always be issues of cheating as long as human beings are involved. To combat that vice is a struggle any industry or profession faces. The National Registry's motivation to fight against cheating, however, holds the highest stakes because ultimately, it involves the safety of the public.

The EMS community can be assured that the National Registry is highly aware of the challenges of determining minimum competency. We will use the most sophisticated methods available to provide security for high stakes testing, which in the end, affects the public in their greatest time of need.

Jimm Murray is Vice-Chairman of the Board of Directors of the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians. He currently serves Air Methods Corporation/LifeNet Division and now resides in La Vista, Nebraska. He began his EMS career in 1968 as an ambulance attendant in Denver, CO, and took the national pilot EMT training program presented in 1969 by the American College of Surgeons. He was the Wyoming state ems director for 22 years and was a state employee for 34 years. Mr. Murray is a charter member of the NREMT and is #3 on the list of actively Registered EMT's in the United States. He is a contributing editor to the EMS INSIDER publication, and has authored over two dozen articles. He is a founder and past president of the National Association of State EMS Directors. He has served on several NREMT committees over the years.

EMS Education Standards Communique #3

The National EMS Education Standards development project is progressing well and on schedule. In February, the project team met to discuss the history and progress of implementing EMS Education Agenda and the potential format for the National EMS Education Standards. The group spent considerable time reviewing various education standards for other professions to help facilitate the dialogue and to get a better idea of what might be an acceptable format for the education standards.

On May 1 -2, 2006, the first National EMS Stakeholders meeting for the project will be held in Silver Spring, Md. and will include invited representatives of national EMS organizations and other interested parties who wish to observe the meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to obtain EMS community input on the proposed format of

the education standards so that the project team may begin development of the initial drafts of the standards. Additional information about this meeting is on the project website: www.nemses.org.

Though the format and level of detail of the education standards has not yet been determined, the project team anticipates the need to use expert writers to help with writing the draft documents. Anyone who is interested in becoming an expert writer for the project can find more information on how to apply on the project web site. All applications must be received at NAEMSE headquarters by no later than April 2