Using a sociological approach to answering questions about paramedic professionalism and identity

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Abstract

With evidence based practice now the norm, paramedics today can confidently and easily search for answers to clinical questions. For anyone seeking to better understand the non-clinical aspects of paramedic practice, however; looking to social theory can be a starting point. Understanding social theory gives paramedic researchers a lens through which to closely examine every day events and behaviours that affect paramedic practice within the context of society. Arguably, the move towards professionalisation is one of the most significant events impacting paramedicine today. The process of professionalisation described by Wilensky (1964) is summarised by Williams et al. as involving five steps:

1. Development of a full-time occupation and formation of occupational territory;
2. Establishment of training schools or colleges; linkage to university education;
3. Occupational promotion to national and international parties;
4. Professional licensing and accreditation;
5. Code of ethics is implemented.

Australian paramedics have been moving through these steps with support for professional registration heightened in recent months. Alongside this professional evolution, the practitioner identity is gradually being challenged and reshaped, raising a number of important questions. Examples include, do paramedics feel that they are a discipline in transition? Do they see themselves as ‘more professional’ in the current climate? How do paramedics now see their role and how would they define themselves? A starting point to explore these and other non-clinical questions raised by professionalisation begins with appreciating how social theory can both inform the questions and guide the research to answer them. The purpose of this article is to explore how two prominent social theorists, Bourdieu and Goffman, can be used by paramedic researchers to explore inevitable questions related to professions and professional identity.

Keywords

Paramedic; social theory; Professionalism; Professional Identity; Research

References


These include new institutionalism, social networks, social identity, social and cultural capital, toolkit and cognitive theories of culture, and resource mobilization. Analytical sociology is an ongoing effort to systematize many of these middle-range theories. Although inequality is everywhere, there are many controversies and questions about inequality that sociologists are interested in, such as where did inequality come from? Why does it continue? Do we justify inequality? Can we eliminate inequality? The sociological approach gives us the methodological and theoretical tools to begin to answer these questions. Cape...
Sociology because they came to term with claims by sociologist like Weber, Merton, Parsons etc, that the state is more of a social than that of a political institution (Johari, 2011). The psychological approach is advanced by scholars like Robert Dahl.


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