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NAEMT Position Statement on EMT and Paramedic Participation in Capital Punishment

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Statement

The National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians (NAEMT) is strongly opposed to participation in capital punishment by an EMT, Paramedic or other emergency medical professional. Participation in executions is viewed as contrary to the fundamental goals and ethical obligations of emergency medical services.

Background

Health care professionals, including physicians, pharmacists, nurses, EMTs and paramedics, continue to be called upon to participate in capital punishment, particularly lethal injection executions. According to the US Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics, thirty-eight states and the federal government had capital statutes in 2005. In 2006, in California, two anesthesiologists refused to monitor the administering of a barbiturate designed to render unconscious a convicted murderer before he was to be killed with two other drugs after a federal district judge ordered, for the first time, that licensed medical personnel administer a sedative before an execution. The execution was postponed and has prompted renewed discussions and debate about medical professionals participating in executions.

Historically, the role of EMTs and paramedics has been to promote, preserve and protect human life. NAEMT's *EMT Oath* is based on the basic principles of saving life, respect for human life and the non-infliction of harm to all recipients of emergency medical service care. The *EMT Oath* is a guide for the EMT and paramedic code of conduct and stipulates that the EMT or paramedic "follow that regimen which, according to my ability and judgment, I consider for the benefit of patients and abstain from whatever is deleterious and mischievous." The obligations to rescue, save and preserve life are part of the essential trust relationship that the EMT and paramedic have with all people in a community and should not be breached even when legally sanctioned.

Participation in capital punishment is inconsistent with the ethical precepts and goals of the EMS profession.

NAEMT strongly opposes all forms of participation, by whatever means, whether under civil or military legal authority.

EMTs and Paramedics should refrain from participation in capital punishment and not take part in assessment, supervision or monitoring of the procedure or the prisoner; procuring, prescribing or preparing medications or solutions; inserting the intravenous catheter; injecting the lethal solution; and/or attending or witnessing the execution as an EMT or Paramedic.

The fact that capital punishment is currently supported in many segments of society does not override the obligation of EMTs and Paramedics to uphold the ethical mandates of the profession.

NAEMT recognizes that endorsement of the death penalty remains a personal decision and that individual EMTs and paramedics may have views that are different from the official position of the profession. Regardless of the personal opinion of the EMT or paramedic on the appropriateness of capital punishment, it is a breach of the foundational precepts of emergency medical services, and a violation of the *EMT Oath*, to participate in taking life of any person.

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National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians • PO Box 1400 Clinton, MS 39060-1400 • 1-800-34-NAEMT