

Speaker 1:

In this episode of Pathways, the calm and the chaos.

Brent Watson:

There's just so much that we get out of our day-to-day operations here at work, knowing when those tones go off, that someone needs help. Someone needs that next level of care that can't be provided at home on an outpatient basis, and they're calling us not only for a ride to the hospital, but to start our early interventions. And I can't think of a more rewarding thing to do on a day-to-day basis.

Speaker 1:

EMTs and paramedics are first to see and provide care to a patient, working quickly, diligently, and in partnership with caretakers at hospitals. This profession is much more than the lights and sirens zooming past you on the highway.

Emily Tadlock:

Welcome back to Pathways, part of Northern Light Health's Healthy, Happy, and Wise podcast series. I'm your host, Emily Tadlock. Just a little background on this second season of Pathways, we are focused on healthcare careers that take two years or less of education or clinicals, allowing you to get your foot in the door. So today, I've ventured over to Dover-Foxcroft's Northern Light Mayo Hospital to chat with paramedic Rich Wilson, and advanced EMT turned RN, who seems to do a little bit of everything now, Brent Watson, that's a long title. I gave it to you myself, but I think it fits, right?

Brent Watson:

Sure, it does.

Emily Tadlock:

Awesome, so thank you both for being on with me today.

Brent Watson:

Absolutely.

Emily Tadlock:

Brent, why don't we just start with you and you tell me a little bit about what it is you do.

Brent Watson:

Sounds good. Well, first of all, thank you for coming out here today. My background is a little lengthy. I took kind of a non-traditional approach to healthcare. I started off as a lab technician doing phlebotomy. Got involved with my local fire department and EMS service in Lincoln, Maine, and had received my basic EMT. Went and got my advanced EMT, and that led me into the career that I'm currently in as an RN in the emergency room. And my official title here at Mayo is Director of Critical Care, which I oversee the emergency room, the intermediate care unit, and the EMS service here at Mayo.

Emily Tadlock:

You did really take a weird... This podcast is called Pathways, by the way, and yours is an interesting one. You were doing lab work first. Why did you decide to make a switch over to emergency medical services?

Brent Watson:

Well, to be honest, it was my exposure in the emergency room. Part of being a lab tech in a small community hospital was, we were required to do phlebotomy in the emergency room. And that is where I really developed a passion for emergency medicine. And dealing, and I saw the nurses and the medics, and everyone that were taking care of my local community at the time, I lived up in that area. And I really felt that I could do more, I wanted to do more. And I talked to a lot of the nurses and EMTs, and that's kind of what stemmed all this and my route in my position that I'm currently at.

Emily Tadlock:

Okay, so then you took a route from EMT, and for our listeners who have no idea, EMT is emergency medical technician.

Brent Watson:

Correct.

Emily Tadlock:

And there are multiple levels of that. So basic EMT, you talked about an advanced EMT. What is that?

Brent Watson:

It's the next step up, it's a progression in the license level. So, our basic EMTs can do basic life support when they act as a first responder or work for an EMS service. The advanced level allows them to do another set of skills. It increases their knowledge level, their assessment skills, medication administration, as well as IV therapy. So, it really takes that next step. It also involves recognition of cardiac arrhythmias. And then the next progression after that would then go into our medic levels, which is even more advanced, as far as life support.

Emily Tadlock:

Rich is getting antsy over there. I'm going to get to you in a minute, Rich. Don't you worry.

Rich Wilson:

[inaudible 00:04:28].

Emily Tadlock:

So, you talked a little bit about basic EMT, then you went to advanced EMT, and then you decided to become a nurse.

Brent Watson:

Correct.

Emily Tadlock:

Okay. So, why the switch there? What happened there?

Brent Watson:

Well, to be honest, I have several members of my family that are registered nurses.

Emily Tadlock:

Okay.

Brent Watson:

And again, working in the emergency room so closely with this, I really wanted to see that continuum of care across the spectrum. And doing first responder with my local fire department up in that area, and then working for an EMS service, I really wanted to see the other side as well. And that's what led me into the nursing realm, so.

Emily Tadlock:

Okay. Well, and now all of those skills have kind of set you up perfectly for the position that you're in now, because you kind of understand both sides. So you're able to understand when your EMTs come to you with an issue or your nurses come to you with an issue, all surrounding the emergency department, you kind of get it all, you understand it all.

Brent Watson:

I try to. I try to see the both sides of the situation. I think one thing when I discuss this with our leadership here at Mayo, and I am in a unique position where I do have the ability to see things from different perspectives because of my background, and I really wanted the opportunity to try to bridge the gap between pre-hospital medicine as well as hospital medicine, and really bring those two areas closer together. That way, one, the more we can improve communication, we're going to improve patient outcomes.

Emily Tadlock:

Right. That's awesome, Brent. Wow, what a winding road to get to where you are, it's pretty cool. So Rich, now I'm going to come to you. Are you excited you finally get to talk?

Rich Wilson:

Oh yeah. I'm not as polished of a speaker as Brent, so I don't know. We'll see.

Emily Tadlock:

Okay. So you are a paramedic, yes?

Rich Wilson:

I am a paramedic, yes ma'am, yeah.

Emily Tadlock:

Okay, so what is a paramedic and how does that differ from, Brent's touched on it a little bit, but you can get into it further.

Rich Wilson:

Sure, so you start as your emergency medical technician, basic. You've got your basic life support, the foundation of assessments, trauma, triage, skills, bandage, splinting, all that stuff. Paramedics, you increase into advanced level assessments. You have advanced airway management, whether that's endotracheal tubes to breathe for the patient who can no longer breathe for themselves. You have intravenous, intramuscular, intraosseous, so into the bone, medications. A widened scope of pharmacology, drugs that you can give the patients.

Our Medical Director, Dr. Sakay, actually had a kind of funny anecdote where when paramedicine started with Dr. Nancy Caroline, who writes those medic books, it was basically, how do I make a cookbook and tell people what I do in the emergency room, and put that on the streets? So, it's essentially what emergency room physicians are doing at a slightly smaller scale.

Emily Tadlock:

Okay, and as someone who has a dad who's a paramedic.

Rich Wilson:

Sure.

Emily Tadlock:

A sister who's an EMT, I grew up watching emergency and some of your first EMTs, they just drove people to a hospital. Didn't really do much triage or anything to get them ready. So, this whole profession has progressed from just transport to providing care right there and saving more lives, because you're able to do that now.

Rich Wilson:

It's a lot more mobile healthcare nowadays, than just true emergencies. There's a lot of healthcare integration between treatments that were typically started just at the ED are now started 20, 30, 40 minutes prior to the emergency room arrival by a paramedic in the back of the truck.

Emily Tadlock:

And Brent, how many lives do you think you're able to save just by being able to do this medicine on the streets?

Brent Watson:

Well, I think that number is beyond what I can measure or even fathom, really. But I think what Rich is saying, and it really highlights an important factor in healthcare, is early interventions do save lives. And the quicker we can start some of these interventions outside the emergency room, it does improve outcomes across the spectrum. Whether you're here in Maine or you're across the United States and California-

Rich Wilson:

Or Florida.

Brent Watson:

... in each state... and Florida, Rich is from Florida.

Emily Tadlock:

Oh, are you?

Rich Wilson:

Yeah.

Emily Tadlock:

Okay.

Brent Watson:

But I think that it really brings a lot of things to light and every state has different protocols that they follow to improve care. And I think Maine as a whole, we are looking to improve our early interventions and really providing the education and training needed to our EMTs, advances and our medics, so we can start this life-saving care right from the get-go when they get called.

Emily Tadlock:

Rich, what drove you to become a paramedic? I mean, and you're from Florida and now you're in Maine.

Rich Wilson:

Oh, boy.

Emily Tadlock:

So there's a two-fold question in there.

Rich Wilson:

So what drove me to EMS really it's, I joke with everybody. I never transitioned the six-year-old part of me who sees lights and sirens and big trucks.

Emily Tadlock:

Oh, yeah.

Rich Wilson:

To the 31-year-old part of me. I love big trucks, lights and sirens and all that. It started in high school, I went to Bartow Senior High School in Bartow, Florida. We had a career academy for HOSA, Health Occupation Students of America, and we had a first responder class that was part of that career academy. So I did that first responder class. I did the Explorer program with Polk County Fire and Rescue, got to ride on the trucks with them. Just got a huge appreciation for that.

The following winter, I guess, I started in January following my senior year of high school, I went to EMT school. I started work on a truck in Sumter County, Florida as an EMT basic. And then right around COVID time, I figured, well, there's nothing better to do with my time than go to paramedic school.

Emily Tadlock:

There you go.

Rich Wilson:

So I went to paramedic school, worked at the same place until I decided it was time to move up to the frozen tundra of Maine.

Emily Tadlock:

Yeah. You just decided, oh, Maine's the place to be?

Rich Wilson:

That's a whole longer back story about my dad being a circus ringmaster growing up. And we would come and do work with Anah Shrine.

Emily Tadlock:

Oh, okay.

Rich Wilson:

And I fell in love with Maine as a child and have always wanted to come up.

Emily Tadlock:

Oh, I love that. Wow, that is full circle, that. Neat. Okay, so let's talk a little bit about, I love that how you mentioned you were kind of captured young. I think a lot of people nowadays, that's how my sister started, that's how my dad started. They were captured young. My three-year-old loves a woo-woo truck.

Rich Wilson:

What's not to love?

Emily Tadlock:

Yeah, and "Wee-ooh, wee-ooh," is one of our favorite things to say. So I get it, being captured young and then developing those skills. But for those people who didn't necessarily get captured young but are possibly interested in this, how long did, we'll start with EMT basic and then EMT Advanced.

Rich Wilson:

Sure.

Emily Tadlock:

How long does it take to get into that?

Rich Wilson:

So EMT basic, it's four months. My class in particular, I went three times a week. Clinicals, kind of sparse in there at the ER and on a truck. Class schedules are different kind of depending on where you go, but your EMT basic is give or take four months. Then you take your national registry exam, pass that, and get licensed with the state. I cannot speak to advanced, but paramedic was about 11 months start to finish for myself. You have to be an EMT basic at the minimum before going into paramedic, but once you've got that, it's about 11 to 12 months.

Emily Tadlock:

And this 11 to 12 months is, it's intense. I would not say it's an easy course at all.

Rich Wilson:

So yeah, my medic program, we went and met at campus one time a week, but we were there from 9:00 AM to 6:00 PM that one day a week. And then clinicals, I usually had to do two to three 12-hour clinicals, whether it's at an emergency room or on an ambulance or fire engine, two to three times a week just to meet the hours-

Emily Tadlock:

The requirements.

Rich Wilson:

... required for that.

Emily Tadlock:

So it seems fast. It seems like a fast program to get through. So you'll have a career quickly, but it does take a lot.

Rich Wilson:

It's a lot of time commitment, but the job prospects are really high. I know people always look to the economy. Healthcare is always needed, EMS, paramedics, they're always needed. So your job outlooks are good following that school.

Emily Tadlock:

I was going to say, so Brent, I'll come to you with this question. We are absolutely facing an EMS shortage across the state of Maine, and it's not just Maine, I mean, this is an across-the-country issue that we're having, but Maine is definitely seeing the strains of the shortage. Talk about that a little bit.

Brent Watson:

You're 100% correct. I think that as a whole, we need to work on retention and recruitment across the spectrum, again. This is not just Maine, again, it's across the country. We need to one, encourage folks at early on in their careers to be interested in EMS, as well as early healthcare. I think that goes a long way when we're looking at different lengths of training. I encourage anyone that's getting into EMS or in nursing or any of those healthcare-related fields, to really check with your state to see how long the class is. Talk to someone that is already in the field doing it, get a perspective of the ins and outs of daily operations. I think that the training for EMT gets your foot into the door and it really opens up a lot of opportunities, whether you stay interested, as Rich did, and became a paramedic, or if you take another route like I did and went and received my RN. So, I think that it really opens up a lot of doors, a lot of opportunities.

And it really is a great field to study, it really is. And the thing that people focus on is job availability. Like Rich said, there's a lot of opportunities for open positions across the state, as well as it's a rewarding field. Most people don't get into this field because of the high pay, long hours, or anything along that. It's because they want to take care of their communities, they want to take care of the people that they see on a daily basis, and the rewards is just unfathomable, so.

Emily Tadlock:

So, I was going to get into that a little bit.

Brent Watson:

Sorry, I beat you to it.

Emily Tadlock:

No, no, I love that you beat me to it. You guys love what you do. I mean-

Rich Wilson:

We do, yeah. I was, to Brent's point about recruiting and retention, I want to point this out from somebody who did come from 1,600 miles away. Fantastic recruiting here at Northern Light. I mean, from applying online, they post their jobs on LinkedIn, on Google, on Indeed, on the Northern Light website. So easy to find. And then setting up that interview, I was like, "Hey, I still live in Florida." They're like, "That's fine." Have a Zoom interview, they were just super communicative throughout. Getting a flight up here to do my work physical and find a place to live. And so recruitment, top-notch, as far as I'm concerned. As somebody who comes from out of state, retention, they have the Work to Grow program. If you're an EMT and you want to go to advanced school, they'll put you through it here at Northern Light and you know where you're going to work right after.

Emily Tadlock:

Oh, yeah.

Rich Wilson:

So it's a phenomenal sense of security at your workplace.

Emily Tadlock:

Let's just talk a little bit too about why, why this job is so unique, why it should absolutely be top of mind for kids who are coming out of school. I mean, really, think about it. Yes, the programs are rigorous because you got to know what you need to know to be able to do the job, so.

Rich Wilson:

Sure.

Emily Tadlock:

But it's still a short program and you've got your foot in the door. You are working as an EMT.

Rich Wilson:

It puts you in such a unique position to have a profound impact on people's worst days. What other job does that? It beats sitting behind a desk from 9:00 to 5:00, as far as I'm concerned.

Emily Tadlock:

And these aren't just random people either, right? These are your neighbors, these are the people that you saw at the grocery store or that you were sitting at your kid's softball game with. You're not only servicing people and that you're helping to save their lives or get them the care that they need, but you're also just being there for them as a neighbor and taking care of your community as a whole.

Brent Watson:

One thing that I would like to kind of point out, and Rich pointed this out is, it's very much a team dynamic. It's not just myself as the director here, but it's also the talent group that is helping us with recruitment. It's senior leadership that is approving these positions, and it's everyone that goes into making this a reality.

A lot of us, when we go through our EMS training, when we do our onboarding, we're doing ride time, we're doing clinical shadowing in the emergency room, and we're doing a lot of those things. And as we talk about opportunities, if you want to stay at the EMS or EMT level, that's fine, and you're allowed to do that. And based on your comfort level and what you want to do and at what level you want to do it at, you can stay there or you can progress. And again, in my experience, I've had the opportunity to work

with a lot of folks that started out at the EMT level, and they've become nurses like myself, or they've become nurse practitioners or physician assistants and even MDs.

So, I think if your passion lies in healthcare, getting into EMS really provides you that strong foundation in going on and doing a lot more in healthcare, if that's what you choose to do. And that's one thing that I think people overlook greatly, is that they feel that the opportunities stop there, when actually it's just the beginning. And there is just so much advancement available, programs out there that will help because let's be honest, part of continuing education is a balance of, do I have the time to do this? Do I have the finances to do this? And getting your foot in the door into an organization such as Northern Light, provides us with a lot of opportunity. Northern Light puts on a lot of EMS programs, they do a lot of cohorts for nursing. There's a lot of assistant programs through foundational grants and other opportunities that help support people financially. And it's really just the beginning, it's all about the individual and how much effort they want to put in. And really, the sky's the limit.

Emily Tadlock:

You're so right, Brent, and while we have a little bit of time here and we're talking about this on this podcast, coming up here soon, we have rolling Earn While You Learn CNA courses. We have respiratory therapy Earn While You Learn courses coming up. Certified surgical technologists, MAs, EMTs. There's so many different programs for people who are interested in getting their foot in the door and becoming a healthcare provider in some way or sense, whatever it is, whether it's driving a woo-woo truck or being in the hospital directly working with a patient, or taking care of patients over the phone. Whatever it is that you want to do in terms of patient care, I think Northern Light Health is there to support you to do that.

Brent Watson:

Agreed, and I know that we set up this meeting to kind of discuss emergency medicine, EMS, etc, but I think that it's important to highlight that any position really can be that gateway position to whatever your passion is.

Emily Tadlock:

Right.

Brent Watson:

I've had a lot of people that work in environmental services, that work security, that work in dietary, that has come to me and saying, "Hey, how do I get involved? How do I become a EMS personnel? How do I become an EMT?" And allowing them that opportunity is a huge part of who we are.

Emily Tadlock:

Yeah, and let's just point out, there's part-time positions too.

Brent Watson:

Absolutely.

Rich Wilson:

[inaudible 00:23:57].

Emily Tadlock:

So you don't have to do it full-time if you don't want to, or if you're just trying to figure out if this is really what you want to do with your life, you can absolutely start part-time. I mean, that's what my dad did. He

started part-time as an EMT and firefighter, and then decided to work his way up. And just recently, I'm not going to tell you my dad's age, I'm going to be nice to him right now and I know he listens to these. So just recently, my dad went back to school and became a paramedic. It took him quite a bit of time, but he realized where his true passion lived and that's what he wanted to do. And as a daughter, I couldn't be more proud because he found his true life's passion. And I think a lot of EMTs and paramedics feel that way about their job and about what they do. And not just that, but you guys are a family.

Rich Wilson:

Oh, yes.

Emily Tadlock:

Yeah. I mean, it's a fun... We talked about the serious stuff, now let's talk a little bit about the fun because the job is fun. And being with your friends and being on a truck with someone that you know has your back and you can trust, and you guys work well together.

Brent Watson:

And I think another area that is really appealing and it is fun, is that the fact that EMS really has a flexible schedule.

Emily Tadlock:

Oh, yeah.

Brent Watson:

Whether or not you do full-time, part-time, per diem, doing 24-hour shifts or 12 hour shifts and having the ability to do either, is a huge piece to a lot of people's lives. Knowing that you can do full-time hours in two days and have the rest of the week to chase other endeavors, other passions. I know a lot of EMS folks that have side businesses that do a lot of things, they travel a lot. And I think that this profession allows for that. Having a schedule where you do two days a week is really appealing to a lot of people.

Rich Wilson:

Yeah, you can't beat it. I mean, it was either last week or two weeks ago, I worked my two days and drove to Rhode Island for a conference and didn't have to take any time off of work for that.

Emily Tadlock:

Yeah.

Rich Wilson:

It's, yeah, you-

Emily Tadlock:

It is not a schedule that you hear very often in other careers. So, I'm glad you mentioned that.

Rich Wilson:

Oh, yeah. It's one of the best perks. You work Monday and Wednesday and then you're done for the week.

Emily Tadlock:

I also heard that you guys eat well here. I've heard it.

Rich Wilson:

The rumor mill may-

Emily Tadlock:

It's been said.

Rich Wilson:

... be true on that one. We've got a full functioning oven here.

Emily Tadlock:

Oh, I like it, I like it. So Brent, do you come over and cook or do you leave that to someone else?

Brent Watson:

I do not come over and cook. However, they do make a lot of popcorn.

Emily Tadlock:

Okay, yeah.

Brent Watson:

Which I have experienced, and they do a good job. They do a good job making their popcorn. But I think the fun part about this is that we do have potlucks. People bring stuff in, and it's very much kind of that family atmosphere that a lot of people are looking for. It's not as corporately structured as a lot of jobs in this world. So I think that that's, again, very appealing for folks and knowing that you can come in and cook for a group and have a barbecue. We have a grill that we can pull out on nice days and cook a burger or a steak, or-

Emily Tadlock:

We're getting there, we're getting there. Another month and you'll be out there cooking, right?

Brent Watson:

As we look out the window and see it snowing.

Emily Tadlock:

Out the window, it's snowing.

Brent Watson:

So-

Emily Tadlock:

I love that, so there you go. So EMT, EMT advanced, paramedic, it's a career that you could get into quickly. It's a career that has a flexible schedule that could work with you however you need it to work.

It's one where the culture is inviting, family oriented. You eat well, you eat great popcorn, and then it's one where you can continue to grow. What more could you ask for, right?

Rich Wilson:

Not much.

Emily Tadlock:

Yeah. It's got it all, I like it.

Okay, so last thing. I'll ask both of you this question. Rich, we'll start with you. If you could say one thing to encourage someone to think about EMS in whatever job it is, EMT, paramedic, what would you say to encourage them to take part?

Rich Wilson:

This job gives you the ability to just be front and center and be a bright spot on somebody's worst day. And I think that's profound for anybody looking to get into healthcare, to bring that level of calm to the chaos that people are experiencing. As soon as you show up, they can relax a little bit because they know you've got it handled.

Emily Tadlock:

We've said this before, while this job is, I think we highlighted some wonderful things about it. You are the calm and the chaos, I love the way you said that. And it's a difficult job sometimes to be that for someone, but I think the passion and the heart that you guys put into what you do is so inspiring. That's a good word, inspiring.

Rich Wilson:

That is a good word.

Brent Watson:

And I'll add another word to it, and I think, and we mentioned this earlier, but rewarding.

Emily Tadlock:

Right.

Brent Watson:

I think from a personal level, from a professional level, there's just so much that we get out of our day-to-day operations here at work that, like Rich said, that calm to a chaotic situation. Knowing when those tones go off, that someone needs help, someone needs that next level of care that can't be provided at home on an outpatient basis. And they're calling us not only for a ride to the hospital, but to start early interventions. And I can't think of a more rewarding thing to do on a day-to-day basis.

Emily Tadlock:

I love that. Thank you both so much for being on with me today. I hope people were able to glean some information. And who knows, maybe you'll have a few new EMTs or paramedics knocking on your door.

Rich Wilson:

I'm looking forward to it.

Emily Tadlock:

Awesome.

Brent Watson:

Please reach out for any shadow opportunities here.

Emily Tadlock:

Oh, I like it. All right. Thanks, gentlemen.

Brent Watson:

Thank you.

Rich Wilson:

Thank you.

Speaker 1:

Thank you for listening to this episode of Pathways. Please join us next time for a new episode. There are several ways you can tune in, on our website at northernlighthealth.org/healthyhappywise. We are also on Apple, YouTube and Spotify, which makes it easy for you to listen on the go on your favorite app.