

# EL paramedic off to work in Dubai

By VUVU VENA

PARAMEDIC Meagan Smith will be jetting off to Dubai today where she will work at a waterpark for a year.

Her new job is not a far cry from the trauma she's used to dealing with as a paramedic in the Eastern Cape. Though she'll be based in a fun environment, she'll also be attending to emergencies and accidents. "I'll be doing the exact same thing that I was doing here, just at a clinic," she said.

The 24-year-old remembers details of those she has encountered in the line of duty since starting work as a paramedic – whether they lived or died.

"My first on-the-road emergency was an accident in the Kei Cuttings," she said. "It was a two-car collision between a Ford Fiesta and a bakkie and I remember there was a girl wearing a pink jacket hanging half out the car window – she was dead."

Smith started working as a paramedic with East London's Alderson Ambulance in 2002 after completing her studies in emergency medical care and rescue at the Durban University of Technology.

The job entails patient transfers, attending to emergencies and sometimes even rescues. While carrying out her duties she encounters anything from heart attacks and strokes to suicides and shootings.

There are three levels in the profession – basic; intermediate and advanced – and Smith has been practising as an advanced life support paramedic for the past two years.

She's the only woman among three paramedics at the advanced level, and also the only woman out of 10 road staff who attends to accidents.

Asked how she dealt with seeing death so often, she replied: "When it comes to adults I don't get emotional, but children, yes." She said staff members are made to talk about work during a "debriefing" session and help is offered to those who need it.

She believes the reason why more women are getting involved in life support is because "the industry is becoming more available to women".

However, giving advice to those interested in the profession, she said: "You can't be over-emotional – you've got to be slightly thick-skinned."

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