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International Commission for Alpine Rescue

Commission for Mountain Emergency Medicine

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First Aid Training Guidelines for Mountain Rescue Service Members

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Intended for Rescuers, Mountain Emergency Physicians and Training
Organizations

Introduction

It is the goal of modern mountain medicine to provide optimal treatment for injured or ill persons at the site of the accident and to transport the patients with stabilized vital functions as gently as possible. The emergency physician cannot work alone.

This paper defines the aims of medical training for mountain rescuers. It suggests minimum times for training and refresher courses.

The mountain rescuer, as a member of a rescue organization, must be able to recognize the severity of an injury or illness, initiate and continue steps necessary to maintain vital functions, and call for the right kind of rescue in order to ensure that the sick or injured person is brought gently and quickly to the receiving hospital.

In addition, each mountain rescuer and specially trained rescuer should have training in mountain medicine.

Refresher courses should be required to such an extent, that the whole first aid basic training is repeated within about 3 years, so that continuity of knowledge is achieved and any new subject that may come up can be integrated.

The national rescue organization must establish quality control in order to maintain medical standards for rescuers.

Basic Training:

General First Aid, Total 15 to 20 Hours minimum:

This training can either be organized by the mountain rescue group itself, or conducted by cooperating rescue organizations, such as the Red Cross.

Required Topics:

Basic anatomy

- Evaluating vital functions: consciousness, breathing, circulation
- CPR
- internal injuries and illness
- Wounds: stopping bleeding and bandaging
- Injuries to the extremities
- Skull and brain trauma
- Spinal injuries
- Chest and abdominal injuries
- multiple trauma
- positioning of the victim
- pediatric emergencies
- basic knowledge of oxygen therapy
- reporting of emergencies

Specialized Training in Mountain Medicine:

Required topics: (according to the needs of each group)

- cold injury: hypothermia, frostbite and non freezing cold injuries
- heat injury: heat exhaustion, heatstroke
- lightning accidents
- high altitude medicine (AMS, HAPE, HACE, other syndromes)
- exhaustion
- ultraviolet radiation: snowblindness, sunburn
- special considerations for avalanche victims
- flight accidents: paragliders, hang-gliding
- cave medicine
- swift water accidents; canyoning accidents

Practical exercises are obligatory during basic training.

Including practice sessions, mountain rescuer basic first aid training will require at least 45 hours.

Further Training:

Only continued repetition ensures that a mountain rescuer will always be ready for duty. For that reason increased attention must be paid to refresher courses. Yearly 15-hour courses would provide complete review of first aid training in three-year cycles. Continued training is mandatory for a member of a rescue organization.

In addition, specially trained rescuers with advanced medical education are needed, to assist the mountain emergency physician. These are in particular air emergency rescuers, dog handlers, etc, but there should be at least one of these specially trained, rescuer in every field team.

In areas, in which paramedics provide advanced life support, they may take the place of mountain emergency physicians.

Expanded Training for Mountain Emergency Medical Staff, Flight Rescuers, Dog Handlers, etc.

The mountain emergency physician needs help from a medical assistant in order to effective advanced life support. This assistant needs additional training go assist the emergency physician and to provide medical care at the scene, before the emergency physician arrives.

Required Topics:

- Rescue techniques and basic medical training, as described above
- Specific demand-oriented training: air ampulance, dog handlers,...
- Expanded and in-depth medical training amounting to minimum 60 hours, including theoretical and practical training as an emergency medical assistant.
- Intensive training in mountain medicine subjects
- practical training period (appr. 100 hours) within the rescue organization
- continued training or refreshed courses.