

The decision-making lifesaving protocol

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Introduction

Although in lifesaving training literature the importance of personal safety is identified, however, its importance doesn't seem to translate into lifesaving methodologies and abandoning a rescue appears only occasionally (4). Annually a number of rescuers get into trouble when attempting rescues because, in stressful situations individuals make errors for several reasons; they underestimated the risk, overestimated their ability, failed to select the safest option, tend to 'do things the way they always do' or the way they expect they should be done, freeze or engage in inappropriate activity (1, 2, 3). A protocol can provide a means of managing the identified weaknesses portrayed by individuals. It can act as a 'road map' that prompts rescuers with questions for specific information and offers specific choices at predetermined points in the process. Such a protocol would be beneficial to lifesavers in emergency situations as away of their training environment they have no guidance.

Aims

To construct a protocol that help rescuers manage the high-risk environment of the lifesaving scene.

Methods

A literature review was undertaken that included the, individual and combinations of, the terms: drown, aquatic emergency, lifeguard, lifesaving, rescue, stress, risk management and employment safety as key words to identify literature relating to individual's preparation for, reaction to, and behaviour under stress. Safety in the context of a work environment also proved to be a beneficial subject which resulted from the review. The search used academic and professional aquatic safety textbooks and research studies that are routinely available in libraries, academic electronic databases and search engines. The available literature was limited to those available and published in English. This search obtained more than 20 references that were used to synthesise the lifesaving protocol.

Results

The study suggested the following 10-step protocol: (1) Is there a problem? (yes, no). (2) Do I get involved? (yes, no), (3) Shout for help. (4) Assess the situation (casualties, rescue aids, hazards, own abilities, possibility of a 'dry' rescue, safe exit points, safe entry points). (5) Make a plan. (6) Tell someone the plan (emergency services, a reliable person at the scene). (7) Implement the plan (organise assistance, abort the rescue, carry out rescue). (8) During implementation reassess the plan (as information becomes available, as situation develops, aborts or carries on). (9) Aftercare of casualties and rescuer, (10) Post-incident review.

Discussion

The protocol considers rescuer safety as paramount. Accordingly, it builds abandonment into the process as a high priority option at decision points for the rescuer. This option is not often considered in educational literature. It gives clear steps and decision points for the rescuer to follow. It is easy to follow under stress by prompting the next step and providing options and questions for the rescuer.

Conclusion

This protocol provides a series of steps, which, if followed, will reduce the amount of risk to which a rescuer is exposed. Also, it indicates points where it is appropriate to actively consider exiting from the process. Finally, it follows a process, which guides the rescuer through the full rescue sequence including post rescue care and review of the actions taken.

References

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