
Lack of evidence blocks development of drowning resuscitation guidelines

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Resuscitation authorities and resuscitation organizations aim at introducing increasingly simple guidelines to facilitate worldwide teaching. The most relevant argument for this simplification is that shorter and easier resuscitation courses will allow more widespread acceptance and practical application. At the same time, great concerns are expressed by the lifesaving communities that the increasingly simplified guidelines are becoming not the optimal treatment in situations where lifeguards, most often teams of volunteers with a duty to respond, have to resuscitate during a drowning situation. Standard resuscitation techniques, more notably the popular compression-only CPR, even may potentially be lethal when applied in a drowning arrest.

During the establishment of the 2010 resuscitation guidelines, the advocates of special drowning guidelines were most of all hindered by the lack of evidence on the optimal technique for drowning resuscitation. In the scientific and political arena of guidelines development, arguments based on common sense, practical experience and eminency, have no value in a discussion with conflicting opinions. As a result, the drowning victim is hardly mentioned in the guidelines.

This presentation will first review the formal process of resuscitation guidelines development and explain how important evidence based data are in maintaining, or changing, resuscitation guidelines. After a short summary of the dying process during drowning, the second part of the presentation will list the distinct elements in the guidelines that may differ between a resuscitation in a primarily cardiac arrest and a secondary cardiac arrest caused by hypoxia during drowning. These distinct issues refer to the parameters when resuscitation may be started and stopped, how to deal with the high inflation pressure, and the application of airway devices and oxygen. In addition, the quality of the performance of resuscitation techniques in cardiac arrest and drowning resuscitation by individuals and teams will be addressed. Current knowledge on these issues is summarized and inspiring suggestions will be made for small scaled research projects of which the results can contribute to the discussions on the future resuscitation guidelines in drowning. The suggestions for more evidence on the resuscitation guidelines for drowning will be further elaborated in an additional workshop.

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