

EDITOR'S COMMENT

In an emergency



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For those not specifically trained in emergency medicine, emergency situations can be intimidating. My first remote posting as a medical officer in Labrador was a case in point. I travelled with the local ambulance to emergency situations, anything from a heart attack to a road accident, with my tummy churning, wondering what would greet me at the other end. And I was very grateful for the presence of the two well-trained locals who ran the ambulance. We even had a 'jaws of life' available, although thankfully we never had to use it during my tenure.

However, there is a growing realisation around the world that emergency medicine is not simply something one practises when faced with an emergency, but a specialisation in its own right. And South Africa has finally realised that as well, although rather late, with trauma becoming a subspeciality of general surgery. The increasing availability of advanced trauma life-support and advanced cardiac life-support courses is a further example of the place of emergency medicine in our society. Unfortunately, trauma has become such an important part of medicine in South Africa that a knowledge of what to do in an emergency is something that every GP must have. Our level of interpersonal violence and injuries due to road traffic accidents is among the highest in the world. Add this to a very high level of cardiac disease, and the importance of emergency medicine becomes clear.

The field is so broad that a single issue on the subject would not have done it justice, so this is the first of two editions on emergency medicine this year. In this edition Dr Clive Balfour and his team have provided a comprehensive set of articles to guide the GP in managing emergency situations. Of particular interest is Clive Balfour's excellent article on analgesia and anaesthesia in emergency situations. This difficult subject is broken down into manageable elements and the article should provide an invaluable reference for future use. Triage is something that we all think we know about, but in fact it is a subject that lends itself to a straightforward explanation of the main points of importance when faced with an emergency situation. Children are a special case in trauma and emergency medicine, and the principles of their management are well explained, as is pre-hospital care of all emergency patients. The use of air evacuation, what to do at the scene of an accident and what emergency equipment and medications you need to have available in your surgery are also well covered. This edition of *CME* should remain on the shelves for a long time as an excellent reference volume.

On another note — as I continue to explore different ways of making *CME* an interesting read, I would like to invite more comment and feedback from the readers. In particular, I would welcome interesting case histories, especially from general practice. These should be relatively short and photographs need written permission from the patient concerned. When I am trawling the literature for case histories, I often think that we could probably find far more interesting cases on our own doorstep from everyone's daily experience. Please send these through to me, electronically if possible, and I will consider them for publication. There is also scope for personal observations, lessons learned from particular patients and anything that people have seen in the literature that they would like to draw my attention to. All contributions will be fully credited, and I also need the original reference if the contribution uses articles in the literature. Enjoy your reading.

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