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Back Talk

Putting spinal management drills into digestible components

Good spinal management focuses on in-line stabilization that protects the neck and spine while allowing effective airway management. Because lifeguards are required to have proficiency with these skills both on land and in water, the necessary skill set is doubled. Listed below are a variety of complicating variables that should be considered and incorporated into in-service training:

- > If on land, the victim could be standing, sitting, on the ground in a supine, prone, or side position, or simply in the location of where the injury occurred.
- > If in the water, the victim's body position is a factor (face up or face down), followed by depth (on the surface, submerged or on the bottom).
- > Water depth: extreme shallow, shallow, mid-depth (3-5 feet) and deep (5 feet plus).
- > Location within the pool and pool architec-

ture: lap lane, diving well, shallow recreation area, high lip gutters, elevated pool deck.

- > The number of lifeguards available.
- > The victim's medical status: conscious or unconscious, followed by the possibility that the victim may need additional treatment for medical conditions or injuries.

Land in-line stabilization progression drill: Two-person guard teams will move into position to provide manual in-line stabilization and airway management for the victim on land. "Airway management" means assisting the victim in having a patent airway.

Objective: Quickly move into the proper position to provide care. Have the lifeguards start 10 feet from the victim. Go through each position:

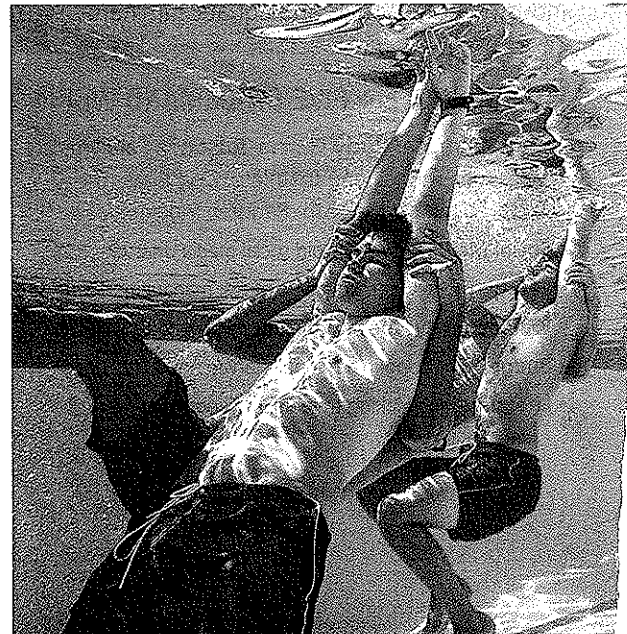
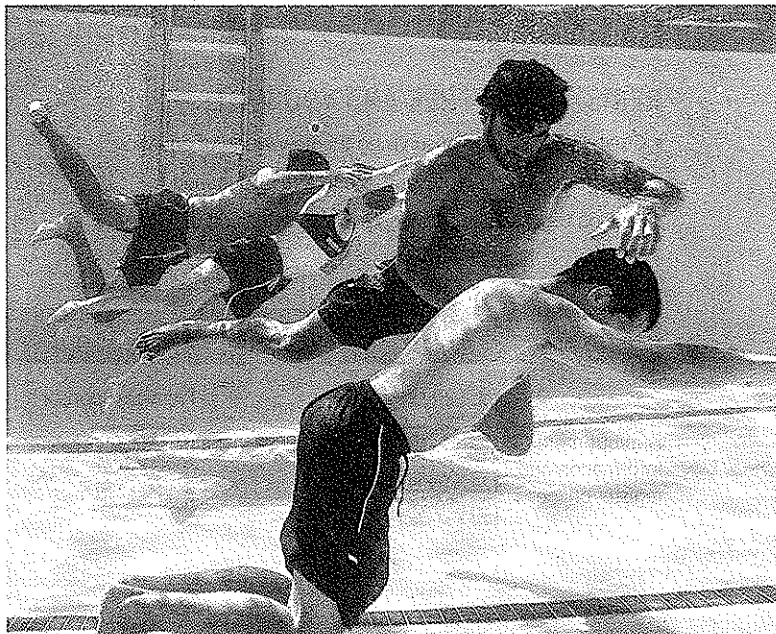
- > Sitting
- > Standing
- > Prone
- > Supine

- > Lateral (Coma)
- > Fetal

Timing goal: Up to 10 seconds for each position.

Once proficient, add a variation(s) to each position.

- > Victim is located under a table, which is movable. (No time added)
- > Victim is located under a table, which is not movable. (No time added)
- > Victim is unconscious and a primary assessment must be performed, victim has a pulse and is breathing (5 seconds)
- > Victim is unconscious and a primary assessment must be performed, victim has a pulse and is not breathing, jaw-thrust maneuver must be used to provide adequate airway management, victim begins to breathe with assistance (10 seconds)
- > C-collar application (If trained to do so, and agency and county EMS protocols allow)



Spinal management progression should follow this sequence: maintain in-line and provide airway management until more advanced medical care takes over, or move victim into neutral position and package on to a backboard. If the latter; additional lifeguards should assist with packaging and extrication. Go through all the positions and variables listed above, adding:

- > Add one or two guards to the team. Package victim; provide care where victim is found.
- > Package and extricate victim to staging area to wait for advanced medical care and continue to treat and monitor victim's injuries.

There is no time limit on these additions due to the importance of maintaining in-line stabilization throughout the whole drill. A good goal would be to complete packaging and extrication before EMTs arrive.

Water in-line stabilization progression drill: Starting in mid-depth water, guard will move into position to provide manual in-line stabilization, either a head splint or head and chin support to the victim.

Objective: Move quickly without causing unnecessary disturbance in the water, reach the victim, provide manual in-line stabilization and provide care. Have the lifeguards start 10 feet from the victim. Go through these victim positions:

- > Prone (surface, submerged, on the bottom)
- > Supine (surface, submerged, on the bottom)

Timing goal: Up to 20 seconds for each position.

Once proficient, add these variations:

- > Shallow water (10 seconds)
- > Extreme shallow water (10 seconds)
- > Deep water (10 seconds)
- > Two-rescuer team, primary lifeguard provides manual in-line stabilization, while the secondary guard provides support, either to the victim or primary guard. (No time limit)
- > Two-rescuer team, variation above plus, once the victim is stabilized; proceed with extrication to the closest wall. (No time limit)
- > Two-rescuer team, variation above exception no verbal communication is allowed.

In-line stabilization transition drill: (6+ lifeguards preferred) Starting at mid-depth, two-rescuer team with the primary guard holding in-line stabilization and the secondary guard providing support on victim who is face-up on the surface.

Objective: A single guard will enter and transition into the primary role, the guard from the primary role will transition into the secondary role, the guard in the secondary role will rotate out. Drill ends when lifeguard in the original secondary role finishes in the primary role and all guards have rotated through all positions.

Timing goal: 15 seconds for the guard to transition into the primary role or into the secondary role

Once proficient, move to the variations:

- > Deep water (add 5 seconds to transitions)
- > Deep water, add another lifeguard to provide additional secondary support (add 5 seconds to transitions)

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- > No verbal communication allowed during the drill (no time change)

Backboard placement transition drill: Primary lifeguard provides manual in-line stabilization, head splint technique.

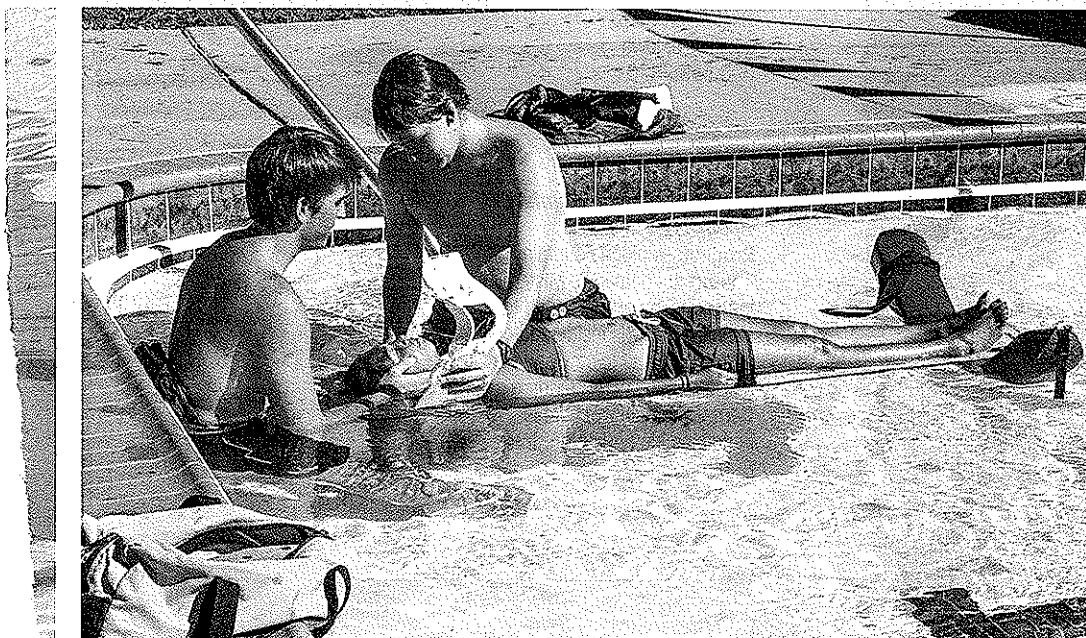
Objective: Complete the following:

- > Secondary rescuer brings backboard and places it under the victim
- > Secondary provides head and chin support, and transitions in for primary guard in providing in-line stabilization support
- > Primary guard utilizes rescue tube under backboard for support
- > Primary guard provides in-line stabilization
- > Secondary rescuer transitions out of providing in-line stabilization support

Timing goal: 45-60 seconds to transition through all the entire sequence

Once proficient, add these variations:

- > Following the drill sequence, add strapping the victim to the backboard (add up to 60 seconds)
- > Following the strapping of the victim to the backboard, extricate the victim out of the pool (add up to 30 seconds)
- > No verbal communication allowed during the drill (no time added)
- > Add an additional lifeguard to the strapping and extrication component (reduce up to 20 seconds)
- > Add two additional guards to the strapping and extrication component (reduce up to 30 seconds)



CAREFUL APPROACH: The underwater approach to the victim (far left) is just as important as the surface approach when dealing with a victim of a possible head, neck and back injury. Have your lifeguards practice bringing the victim to the surface (middle); too often this part of the sequence is rushed over. If your agency allows the use of a C-collar (right), make sure the lifeguards practice in-water application.

PHOTOS BY KYLE MAXWELL