TACTICAL MEDICINE

By Dr. Dan Olesnicky

Combat Medical Gear

Essential tools could mean life or death.

At the International School of Tactical Medicine (ISTM) in Palm Springs, CA, tactical medical gear is an ever-evolving discussion. In the tactical medical environment we are constantly bombarded with more new equipment that we're expected to carry. This equipment gets very heavy. Everyone wants to know what the right toolkit is and how to deploy it. I wish it were that simple.

Equipment Lists Vary: We're asked to provide standard lists of equipment needed for a tactical operation for an agency SOP. If there was a standard configuration, it would be easy. There is no single standard for the makeup of any tactical unit, much less its medical element.

The medical component of a tactical unit can be made up from an array of first responders, Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT), Paramedics (EMT-P), corpsmen, nurses, physician assistants, or physicians. The gear they carry depends on their levels of training, budget, distance and time to the treatment facility and ultimately, agency SOP. One must think of what the individual practitioner is actually trained or certified to do in the tactical environment.

In summary, make sure you use a modular approach and distribute medical equipment among team members. Streamline your equipment list and carry as little unnecessary gear as possible. Vacuum-pack everything for durability, ease of identification and restocking.

The prepackaging of different items within a modular system aids in the process of stocking items. The durable, clear-plastic packaging aids in ready identification of the packaged items and package contents. Prepackaged supplies kept in the support vehicle, personal, basic, intermediate and advanced Medical Modules all can be re-stocked immediately as needed during the mission or after it has been completed.

In the tactical environment, whereas lightweight, compact tactical litters or other extrication devices are typical additions to the BMM, Physicians and mid-level providers such as corpsmen, nurses and paramedics will benefit from the Intermediate Medical Module (IMM). This module will contain advanced airway tools, suturing supplies, IV preparations and medications.

The Advanced Medical Module (AMM) is reserved for physicians and will have surgical instruments.

Durability, Utility and Vacuum Packaging: Tactical units deploy in every kind of environment from desert-dry to hurricane-wet. Once wet, most packaging becomes soft and tears open, exposing our costly medical items to contamination with water, dirt and bacteria. This renders our equipment useless in the tactical pre-hospital environment. If moisture is not your problem, friction and time will do the same damage to your packaging.

The best technique is to vacuum package it. The evacuation of air from the equipment creates a very compact package that is only a fraction of its prior bulk. The slight addition in weight from the plastic packaging is clearly offset by reducing the size of your medical pack and streamlining your profile.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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Having the appropriate medical tools with you could mean the difference between life and death for this downed officer.