

POLICEONE.COM News

04/01/2009



Career Survival
with Sgt. Betsy Brantner Smith

News from TRESPO: Field trauma care for LEOs

Dr. Sydney Vail is a veteran trauma surgeon most recently of Phoenix, Arizona, and his love of law enforcement is obvious. His conversation is peppered with terms like "the guys" and "my guys" as he talks with pride about his new affiliation with the Arizona Department of Public Safety as their "doc." He is also affiliated with the International School of Tactical Medicine and on the first day of [TRESPO West 2009](#) he taught a class called "*Field Trauma Care for the Law Enforcement Officer: The Life You Save May Be Your Own.*"

It's a topic we all need to learn more about.

SWAT teams and military police units often have their own doctors and/or medics, but your average street cop is generally reliant on the local fire department for medical help. In fact, in some areas this may be a volunteer fire department with minimally trained (although very dedicated) EMS workers who get the call out.

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As we all know, with a traumatic injury, seconds count, Dr. Vail believes that cops need to be able to quickly and effectively render self-aid or fast and effective first aid to their co-workers right on the street. He recommends that officers carry a pack (either homemade or commercially available) on their body containing a tourniquet, QuikClot gauze or some other clotting agent, band aids, and saline solution for flushing. Using these simple and easy to obtain first aid measures, you can stop bleeding until more help arrives.

Dr. Vail told me, "If you can stop the bleeding on the street, I can probably fix the rest in the operating room."

Dr Vail recommends that officers get self-aid training if possible, but he says that even an untrained citizen should be able to take your personal medical pack and render aid to you if necessary. Being a "cop's doc," he also knows that we need to try to get to cover, stay vigilant for more threats, control our breathing and make sure we have a means to communicate (he believes that all cops should carry a cell phone in addition to their portable radio for such purposes) while we are rendering self-aid for field aid to a downed fellow officer.

I encourage you to take Dr. Vail's words to heart. We all carry first aid packs of some sort in our vehicles, but can you get to that pack if you truly need it for yourself or a fellow officer during an on going critical incident? There are many great products out there; do your research to make sure they really work (Dr. Vail says that many products don't live up to their marketing) and then put them in a little pack and keep it with you at all times!

The Arizona DPS has lost 27 officers in the line of duty since 1958, Dr. Vail is determined to make sure number is never increased.