

CHAPTER 1

Prehospital Emergency Medicine

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Introduction

'Prehospital care' is the term given to the provision of medical care outside of the hospital or alternative fixed healthcare setting. In the developed world, the provision of prehospital care is usually the responsibility of a regional ambulance or emergency medical service (EMS). A number of agencies may operate in support of the ambulance service including private ambulance companies, rescue organizations (e.g. mountain rescue, air ambulance services), the voluntary aid societies (e.g. Red Cross) and immediate care practitioners (e.g. British Association of Immediate Medical Care, BASICS).

Prehospital emergency medicine

Prehospital emergency medicine (PHEM) is a field within prehospital care (Figure 1.1). PHEM's evolution has been triggered by the demand to meet new challenges imposed by the regionalization of specialist medical and trauma services. Many of the critically injured or unwell patients that prove to benefit most from these new systems of care are paradoxically those less likely to tolerate extended transfer without advanced critical care support. As a result, there is a need to provide a body of prehospital practitioners capable of providing advanced clinical assessment and critical care intervention at the scene of an incident, together with safe critical care retrieval to an appropriate centre of care. In most continents the enhanced skill set required to provide this level of care falls outside that deliverable by the ambulance service or its supporting bodies, and therefore requires the deployment of specially trained physician-led teams.

The role of the PHEM practitioner or team is to augment the existing prehospital response, not replace it. Their function is to provide an additional level of support for those patients with higher acuity illness and injury, both on scene and during transfer. In doing so they are also well placed to educate and enhance the skills of the prehospital providers they work alongside.

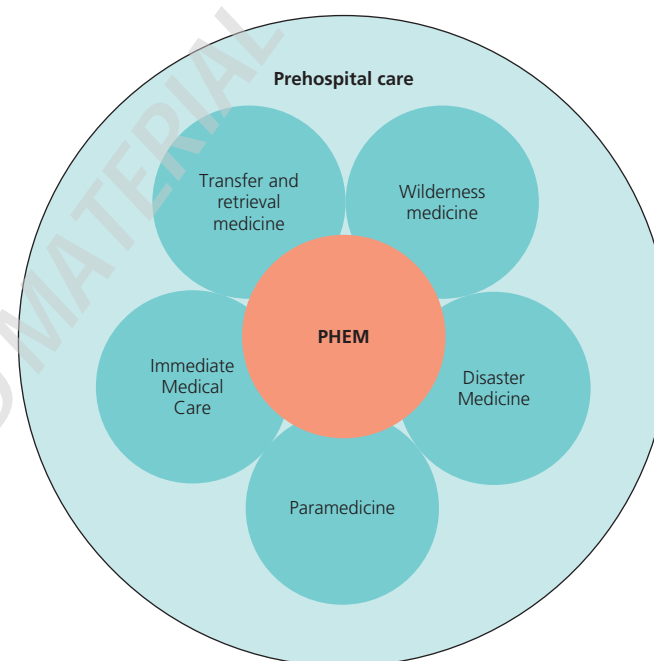


Figure 1.1 Prehospital emergency medicine.

Training in PHEM

An important move forward in the evolution of the field of PHEM in the UK has been its recognition as a new medical subspecialty led by the Intercollegiate Board for Training in prehospital Emergency Medicine (IBTPHEM). IBTPHEM has produced a curriculum that outlines the knowledge, technical skills and non-technical (behavioural) skills required to provide safe prehospital critical care and safe transfer. Links to the IBTPHEM and their curriculum can be found in the further reading section. The key themes of the curriculum are shown in Figure 1.2.

Similar prehospital training programmes exist across Europe (e.g. Germany) where they are firmly integrated into medical training and the emergency medical services (EMS). In Australasia, geography has been the driving force behind the development of retrieval medicine as a specialization. A number of retrieval services (e.g. Greater Sydney Area HEMS) have recognized the commonality between PHEM and retrieval medicine and have



Figure 1.2 Prehospital emergency medicine curriculum themes (Courtesy of IBTPHEM).

moved towards delivering a combined model that provides both interfacility secondary transfer and primary prehospital retrieval. The experiences of many of these systems has helped mould the new PHEM subspecialty within the UK.

Summary

PHEM is a challenging and exciting development within the area of prehospital care. This book aims to provide some of the underpinning knowledge required for effective PHEM practice.

Further reading

IBTPHEM website: www.ibtpphem.org.uk.