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VITALS

A Weekly Safety Newsletter For Medical Transport Professionals

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Wheelchair Rider Risk In Motor Vehicles



There was interesting article published in the Journal of Rehabilitation Research & Development, Volume 37, Number 1, in January/February 2000. The title was "Wheelchair rider risk n motor vehicles: A technical note." It was written by Greg Shaw, PhD.

It reviewed the importance of wheelchair tie downs and occupant restraint systems (WTORS). THOMCO feels very strongly that this is such a critical issue that we have Lionel Young with O'Strain sharing his expertise at the Safety Net Seminar in Dallas, May 6-8. Lionel will address many of the problems cited by Dr. Shaw.

Some of the events described by Dr. Shaw which could have been prevented by following the practices that Lionel will present include:

- Van halted suddenly, patient fell forward
- Van stopped suddenly, patient fell out of wheelchair
- Unsecured wheelchair fell over in a transport van
- Wheelchair broke free in dialysis transport
- Wheelchair fell over backward
- Wheelchair fell over sideways
- Patient fell out of wheelchair when van swerved
- Patient fell backwards when van accelerated
- Van turned too quickly
- Patient was tossed around in van.

If any of these sound familiar, you need to hear Lionel's message.

Dr. Shaw did some statistical analyses that related fatality rates to vehicle mass and came up with a formula for calculating vehicle fatality rates for "any vehicle" and for "larger vehicles". We'll skip the math, but share Dr. Shaw's conclusions:

- "The majority of wheelchair rider injuries could be prevented by providing protection for abrupt vehicle maneuvers" (Wouldn't it be better to avoid abrupt vehicle maneuvers by using the principles taught in "Arrive Alive Do No Harm"?)
- "The type, size, and mass of the vehicle have a substantial effect on the fatality rate, although although this effect decreases for heavier (>3,000kg) (>6,600 pound) vehicles.
- "Wheelchair riders who cannot properly use tie down and occupant restraint systems or who are frail would face a lower risk of injury if transported in larger vehicles."

Since economics don't allow for modified paratransit Hummers, we'll use the WTORS that Lionel will demonstrate.

Erratum: Correction from the week before's Vital Newsletter, Joe Zingale's correct email address is: jzingale1@bellsouth.net

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