Medical emergency – who are you going to call?

A new maritime-related paramedic university course in Poland is providing more options for seafarers – and better medical service on board

Captain Kamil Kielek MNI

1800, end of the 12-hour watch. Handover, a pleasant chat with the other mate, then a quick dinner and hitting the shipboard gym. Nothing unusual, 'another day, another dollar' as many say. After the evening routine, a well-deserved bedtime. Ring-ring… ring-ring… not the alarm clock, but a cabin phone. Ring-ring… I must have overslept! Glance at the cell phone charging near the bunk. Around 3 o'clock. Way too early for a wake-up call? Ring-ring… 'This is the captain speaking, there is CPR ongoing on the main deck. Can you go and assist?'

He had to repeat himself before my sleepy mind could process the message, but then I rushed. I put on the closest clothes I could find and went to the bridge which I had left just a few hours ago. 'The casualty is in the tea shack on the poop deck, the rescue helicopter was ordered,' the captain said. The deck was lit, but all works were suspended. Ongoing radio communication in the background. I put on my PPE and grabbed a UHF radio for myself. The deck crew led me to the tea shack. The casualty was on the floor, receiving good-quality chest compressions, the defibrillator (AED) was to one side, its pads connected to the casualty's chest. I put the resuscitation bag together and connected it to the oxygen cylinder. 'How many shocks so far?' I asked. 'None.' The CPR continued. I prepared an IV cannula for adrenaline and fluids routinely used in cardiac arrests. 'How long have you been resuscitating?' 'Fifteen minutes? Maybe...?' The answer was understandably hesitant.

The cannula is inserted and secured. The flow is confirmed, followed by the first 1mg of epinephrine washed down with a few millilitres of NaCl. AED's cardiac rhythm check. The 'Do not touch the patient' order is given by a robotic voice. CPR ceases for a moment. 'Shock advised'. Electrical current passes between the pads. The aim is to restart the harmonic contraction of the hearth's cells. The whole body of the person shakes for a fraction of a second. Chest compressions immediately resume…

A seafarer – and a paramedic

My name is Kamil Kielek. I am a Polish seafarer. Having started as a deck cadet, I worked my way up to a Master's position in the offshore industry. I am also a paramedic. I worked in ambulances and on a large construction project in Poland. These experiences allowed me to pursue a career as a safety coach, instructor, and later a consultant for international standards in safety and training. When joining a ship, I always tell captains and medics, where present, about my education and experience. Accidents inevitably happen, and I have put my skills to use a number of times. Now I work mainly ashore, but with occasional trips on ships in different roles. This may seem unusual, but in future, it will be far from unique.

Working offshore involves a wide range of different working environments, large numbers of individuals, high demands, and sometimes pressure, but also high standards of health and safety. The ongoing development and evolution of maritime markets also necessitates the ongoing evolution of training standards in different professions.

To become an emergency medical technician (EMT)/paramedic or 'ratownik medyczny' (literally 'medical rescuer') in Poland, one has to complete a three-year degree in emergency medical care in one of the accredited higher medical schools. This enables you to work as a professional in ambulances and other emergency medical services, emergency rooms, hospital wards etc. Recognising the demand and possible future shortages of trained personnel working also in the developing Polish offshore energy sector, the Pomeranian Medical University of Szczecin decided to expand its educational offer. The newly offered course is called 'Emergency Medical Care with Maritime and Offshore Sector Safety'.

Opening up opportunities

Students will follow programmes enabling them to become fully qualified medical professionals. This will be complemented with training and certificates enabling graduates to work near and at the sea. The first-year curriculum includes a full lifeguard training course, and we hope that at least some of our future paramedics will get their first rescue experiences during their summer breaks. We invited some of the best lifeguard and rescue institutions, such as the Polish Search and Rescue Service, to help us provide the best possible in-water training.

The second-year curriculum includes full basic STCW training for seafarers. This will enable students to gain the competencies required for work on ships, receiving their first Certificates of Competence and discharge books. After the second year, students may decide to seek employment on ships. The third and final year will again cover largely practical subjects. At this stage, students will receive GWO Basic Safety Training, which enables them to work as professionals in the wind turbine industry.

The diverse and internationally recognised training will enable students to gain valuable experience and help them decide which career path to choose. We hope our students will end their programme as open-minded, safety-conscious medical professionals who know the vast opportunities that await them.

In October 2023 the first students have already started their studies. If this programme is seen as successful, we would like to expand the University's offer further into offshore HSE standards and international maritime legislation.

More at the website of the Pomeranian Medical University of Szczecin:
www.pum.edu.pl
Feel free to reach out:
kamil@horizonsolutions.pl