

Are We Ready? A Review of Western Canadian Hospital Resuscitation Capability in Response to Avalanche Victims

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Avalanches are a common risk thread that run throughout the backcountry in Canada, and can affect the safety of both recreational users and commercial operations that venture into these areas. Although not a commonly seen presentation in the emergency department, the potential for its occurrence is significant enough that those recreational users or professionals working in avalanche-affected areas, as well as emergency physicians, paramedics, search and rescue technicians, and evacuation personnel, should be aware of regional hospital capabilities to respond to avalanche victims, as part of their emergency management plan. This knowledge will aid in expediting care for avalanche victims in obtaining the necessary "life or limb-saving" measures as quickly as possible. Consideration should be given to the utilization of a region-by-region "Life Link Map" to act as a guide in pursuing the most immediate and capable hospital facility to provide this specialized care. Further, in accordance with the International Commission for Alpine Rescue (ICAR) guidelines delineating the optimal care of avalanche victims, early medical intervention in the way of on-site rescue-familiar emergency physicians or other advanced life support providers, as part of a rescue "medical strike team", could significantly increase the likelihood for positive outcomes for avalanche victims who await lengthy rescue or evacuation times in Canada.