Acute Emergencies
in the Community

Introduction

For seriously ill or severely injured patients, acting quickly in the pre-hospital period is crucial, with decisions and interventions greatly affecting outcomes. There is a need to manage the situation and minimise secondary injury before transfer to hospital. This module presents some scenarios which may be faced by any primary health care professional and offers recommendations on how to respond.

If a potentially life-threatening problem is identified, the two major objectives are to administer life-saving treatments or interventions, and to prepare the patient for transport. Some clinicians may find the emergency situations in this module are a rare occurrence in their area of work. However, it is important to recognise that our emergency care may have a significant impact on morbidity and survival. UK statistics from out-of-hours contacts to primary health care indicate that only 1% – 2% of patients will require resuscitation, with most having conditions that can be managed at home[1]. This module will not deal with acute emergencies which are covered in other modules: management of psychiatric emergencies or life-threatening illness in children.

The cases are designed to illustrate the problems described in the aims of the module. They are real cases but are not meant to be the focus of the group's discussion. Instead, PBSGL groups are encouraged to think of similar cases in their own place of work.

As with all of our modules, the contents were drawn from a learning needs discussion held by a group of 10 primary care clinicians: GP nurses, GPs and pharmacy staff. Thus the contents span the needs of a range of professions who work in the community.

Studying all the cases is not compulsory. If the group runs short of time and completing the group feedback is still to be done, it is better to leave out a case completely. The feedback, where group members say what changes they will make in practice as a result of the meeting, is an essential part of the learning process – more important than "completing the cases"