Barriers To The Care Of Obese Patients During Helicopter Emergency Medical Services Transport

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Introduction
- Helicopter Emergency Medical Transport Services (HEMS) are challenged with providing safe and effective care.
- Obese patients present unique challenges.
- Weight restrictions based on equipment limitations of stretcher and airframe.
- Clinical and safety concerns for transport of obese patients have not been studied in the HEMS setting.

Objectives
- Determine real and perceived concerns of clinical professionals in the transport of obese patients in the helicopter setting.
- Provide data for providers and HEMS programs that may be used to establish clinical guidelines.
- Provide data to improve crew and patient safety.

Materials and methods
- Quantitative descriptive study
- Convenience sample of current and former HEMS providers
- Survey developed by researchers
  - Evaluated by current and former experts in the field of HEMS transport
  - Survey disseminated via direct email
  - Link emailed through ASTNA/IAFCCP
- Data evaluated by researchers independently
  - Third part reviewer with experience in qualitative data review

Results
- 86% have equipment related weight restrictions
- 17.1% have clinical related weight restrictions
- 95.7% have anticipated barriers to transport of the obese patient
- 85.1% have experienced barriers to transport of the obese patient
- 20% have assistive devices for moving/lifting obese patients
- 89% have adjusted the plan of care or mode of transport for obese patients

What Respondents Said
- “Everything is harder...everything”
- “Poor access to pt due to limited space; safety for pt and crew during loading and unloading pt from aircraft; unable to position pt properly for effective ventilation”
- “It is virtually impossible to do anything for the pt once loaded and secured due to space limitations”
- “Strapping patients to the floor is inhumane”
- “Pressure to try to make it work. Pressure to fly”
- “Egress due to aircraft issues such as precautionary landings, fire, hard landings, etc."
- “I feel that I am placed into unsafe situations. I also feel we are placing patients in unsafe situations”

Conclusions
- HEMS transport personnel have anticipated or experienced barriers to providing safe and effective care to the obese patient.
- Barriers identified include crew and patient safety, proper positioning, and effective medical management.

Implications For Practice
- Recognition of clinical and safety barriers present during transport of obese patients.
- Improved clinical guidelines for the transport of obese patients.
- Improved decision matrix for mode of transport for obese patients.
- Decreased risk for patients and transport crews.

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