

January 2016 Safety Article - The ABCs of "Oops!", Part One

"So what is it that I am supposed to do if my riding partner goes down on a ride?"

It's a great question that all of us should be asking every time we go out for a ride. In fact, it was a similar question I asked myself every time I was summoned to respond when someone in distress called 911. You see, I spent several years serving in the Fire & EMS world. There were motorcycle accidents, heart attacks, broken bones, shooting victims, people who had been burned, babies being born, and people just being flat-out dead...all kinds of things that I had to be prepared for at any given moment. Each scene of every alarm presented a different need. Each one required a professional who could control the situation and be of help. Many times, multiple people would arrive from multiple agencies to provide care, especially if there were multiple patients. The care provided would have to be explained in a language that hospitals, fellow care providers, and law enforcement officials could understand and enable them to do their job. Because of these different scenarios and the multiple levels of care involved, some kind of standardized assessment has to be in place to enable everyone to prioritize threats to life and health and then provide appropriate care.

While I no longer practice or teach emergency medicine, I will occasionally find myself in a situation where I am glad that I had the formal education and experience to be of service for others. There are many experts in the world of motorcycle safety. My thought is to leave the research and tactics to the experts and share with you some very brief topics of basic patient assessment that were taught to me, that I practiced, and then taught to other first responders and students by using the acronym "SLABCAB".

Disclaimer: This is not a course in emergency medicine. The next few monthly articles are a highly superficial summary of how some emergency medical providers assess for life threatening injuries and conditions in their patients. The intent is to help you feel more confident in knowing how to help your riding partners in case of a motorcycle accident. Road rash, broken fingers, and busted motorcycle fairings can be dramatic, but they are not necessarily life threatening. The items I'll cover usually are, and are to be addressed as a priority with dispatchers when calling 911 or talking to emergency service providers. For your sake, and that of your riding partners, you are encouraged to seek out classes on CPR and First Aid and keep a few supplies on your bike at all times....just in case.

"SLABCAB" is something that I could remember in the middle of the night when was running on no sleep and there were distractions from seemingly 137 directions. Care for my patients always began with the "S" which means "Scene Safety". This means that before any kind of care be provided, that the risk to myself, my partners, the patient, and any bystanders is minimized. Examples of this would be making sure there is someone who can stop traffic in case of a motorcycle incident in the road, making sure the bike is turned off, and that there is no fuel spilling. If there is fire involved, make sure it is safely extinguished.

In the case of a fall or vehicle accident, "S" can also mean "Spinal Stabilization". Damage to the spinal cord resulting from trauma isn't always observable by the naked eye or the touch of a hand and often requires x-ray photos to detect. So, in cases of motorcycle accidents, it may be best to leave the helmet in place unless the helmet is obstructing the person from having a clear airway or rescue breathing is necessary.

The next step, "L" is "Level of Consciousness". There are different levels of consciousness that can be assessed. A person is fully alert if they are aware to place, date and time. A person responsive to verbal stimuli will respond to their name, but isn't otherwise well aware. A person can be responsive to painful stimuli only, meaning they will only respond with a stout pinch on the arm or when rubbing knuckles across one's sternum. A person is unresponsive when none of the above causes a response. There really is not much one can do to improve or treat a person's level of consciousness, it is simply a potential indicator of brain trauma or blood flow to the brain. This can assist 911 dispatchers better understand the situation and allocate appropriate resources.

Over the next few months, I'll continue with the summary of what "SLABCAB" is and how it can help you help your friends. In the meantime, spend some time thinking of things that could be hazards at an accident scene. What would you do to help reduce them and improve safety at the scene? If it were you that had the motorcycle accident, what are some things that you would want your riding partners to have in their saddlebags to help you?

When we ride together, we are all responsible for the safety of ourselves and each other. Learn the things that can save your life and the lives of others, and....

"Hey! Let's be CAREFUL out there!"

- By Matt Thomason