

Emergency Medicine in Austria

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Emergency and Disaster Medicine in Austria is the responsibility above all the emergency medicine organisations, the technical emergency organisations and the emergency physicians. The legal basis for training emergency medicine physicians, which was established in the year 1987 and prescribed the extent and content of their training, was initiated primarily by the Austrian Society of Emergency and Disaster Medicine. An amendment to the Austrian Physicians Law passed in 1998 contains in Section 40, Paragraphs 1-3 the new regulations governing medical practice as an emergency physician and in Section 40, Paragraphs 4-6 those defining the activities of the Head Emergency Physician. Physician-staffed emergency medicine systems are available to almost the entire population of Austria, even though the Alpine terrain does not always make it possible to keep within the optimal 15-minute rescue time.

Austria's emergency medicine systems are headed by physicians. As part of their duties they ensure the basic and continuing training of the staff physicians. The physicians in the Alpine rescue system are also responsible for the training, on-going training and consulting activities of that system. Furthermore they serve as the medical directors of Alpine rescue missions and accompany mountain expeditions and of rescue search teams. Public health care officers working for the police force, in health care services and in state governments are also involved in emergency medicine. Their duties are largely of a public health nature but with law-enforced competence. Physicians at university hospitals and general hospitals, the final members in the chain of survival, are a special group. In addition to their most important duty, namely to finalize recovery of emergency patients, they are also responsible for teaching medical students and conducting postgraduate training sessions. Austria's first university department of emergency medicine was recently established in Vienna and has brought forth numerous internationally recognized scientific studies and publications.

Since the 12th of December 2001 Austria has a law for emergency services personal, which covers their activities and the profession of that personal. Their duties, the job description and legalization of their activities is the subject. The law distinguishes between "Rettungssanitäter (RS)" and "Notfallsanitäter (NFS)", both of whom are allowed to practise in connection with the following organisations: "Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund, Johanniter Unfall Hilfe, Malteser Hospital Dienst, Österreichisches Rotes Kreuz, Sanität des Bundesheeres", institutions of the government and other institutions under the leadership of an emergency physician. The training for the "Rettungssanitäter" includes 260 hours, partly theoretical, partly practical. The training for the "Notfallsanitäter" additionally covers 480 hours theoretical and practical on the MICU and as trainee in the hospital. This training is supplemented by two stages of learning "Notfallkompetenz", which allows the emergency services personal to perform medical treatment under strong legal prescriptions. The first stage deals with pharmaceuticals, venous access and infusion therapy, in the second stage mechanical ventilation and orotracheal intubation are the subjects.

Precisely for emergency medicine the law demands recertification at set intervals, because an emergency physician and EMS personal can save so many lives.