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Katzer, Robert J
Frumin, Erica
Silverman, Danielle
et al.

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In-flight Medical Emergencies: Creation of a Novel Simulation Based Medical Student Curriculum

Running head

Managing In-flight Medical Emergencies

Authors

Robert J. Katzer MD, Erica Frumin MD, Danielle Silverman MD, Kristi L. Koenig MD, and Carl H. Schultz MD

Institution where research was conducted

University of California, Irvine School of Medicine
Irvine, California, United States of America

Address for Editor and Reader Correspondence

Robert Katzer MD
101 The City Drive South
Route 128-01
Orange, CA 92868
(714) 456-5239 Office
(714) 456-5390 Fax
rkatzer@uci.edu

Dear Sir

An estimated 20,000 in-flight medical emergencies occur in the United States annually (Silverman et al. 2008). Aircraft cabins are loud, confined spaces, without direct access to established medical care (Mattison et al. 2011). The reduced humidity and atmospheric pressure, and loss of personal mobility all present specific pathophysiologic considerations for physicians that respond to a fellow passenger in need (Silverman et al. 2008). There are no United States medical school curriculum requirements specific to this community need.

We hypothesize that medical students do not feel comfortable assisting during an in-flight medical emergency nor do they have an adequate fund of knowledge in this area. Additionally, we hypothesize that a focused curriculum, including a simulated medical emergency in a mock aircraft cabin, will improve both comfort and fund of knowledge.

Thirty-seven medical students completed a ninety-minute curriculum on in-flight medical emergencies. The curriculum consisted of a lecture attended by the entire group and a simulation case. All participants completed a baseline questionnaire prior to learning the curriculum. This document included demographic information, self-assessment questions addressing their perceived knowledge of several aspects of in-flight medical emergencies, and fund of knowledge questions. Participants then completed the simulation case. After completing the simulation scenario, twenty-two students also completed a post-session questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were performed on the baseline

questionnaire. Pre- and post-session questionnaire results, were compared with t-tests.

Ten (27%) of the participants had been on an aircraft during a medical emergency, but only one (3%) of the participants had assisted in management of the emergency. One participant (3%) had prior training in flight physiology or in-flight medical emergencies. Students expressed poor initial self-assessment of knowledge, confidence, and competence, with a mean Likert-type question response less than 3 (1 representing strong disagreement, 7 representing strong agreement). Initial mean score on fund of knowledge questions was 64% (95% CI: 59%-69%). Of the paired responses, the mean fund of knowledge score increased from 61% to 91% ($p<0.0001$) and all of the mean self-assessment responses increased ($p \leq 0.001$).

The participants' responses to both subjective and objective questions indicated that they were not optimally prepared to render aid during in-flight medical emergencies. Our curriculum improved their scores on objective and subjective questions, indicating they may be better prepared to respond to future in-flight medical emergencies. If replicated on a larger scale, medical schools should consider adding basic training for in-flight emergencies to emergency medicine curricula.

References

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Mattison ML, Zeidel M. Navigating the challenges of in-flight emergencies. *JAMA* 2011;305:2003-4.