

# Are You Prepared for A Medical Emergency?

**THE ABILITY TO MANAGE MEDICAL EMERGENCIES IN THE DENTAL OFFICE IS OF CRITICAL IMPORTANCE. WHILE SYNCOPE IS THE MOST FREQUENTLY REPORTED EVENT, IT HAS BEEN ESTIMATED THAT AN AVERAGE OF ONE OTHER MEDICAL EMERGENCY WILL ARISE EVERY FOUR YEARS IN THE TYPICAL GENERAL PRACTITIONER'S OFFICE. WILL YOU BE PREPARED?**

Preparing for a medical emergency begins with prevention. Before initiating treatment, all necessary and relevant medical information should be obtained in order to determine the clearest indication of the patient's health status. Depending on the nature and extent of the services contemplated, appropriate alterations to dental treatments may be advisable to safely manage the care of a medically compromised patient. In addition, key dental office staff - especially persons directly involved with the delivery of care to the patient - should have current certification in basic life support (BLS), or cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

In the Winter 2000 issue of *Dispatch*, the College provided recommendations to prepare for a medical emergency, including a list of six essential drugs that should be readily available in the emergency kit of every dental office. However, it is not enough to merely have these drugs available; members must be prepared to use them if necessary.

With this in mind, the advisory board to PEAK is pleased to offer the following article: *Emergency Drugs*, from *Dental Clinics of North America* (Volume 46, October 2002). The article

plainly sets out the six essential drugs that should be included in the office emergency kit, and goes on to suggest several supplementary drugs that should be considered. It then reviews the management of common emergencies that may be encountered in a typical general practice, incorporating the drugs discussed in the article.

#### **Key points to consider:**

- The most important aspect of nearly all medical emergencies in the dental office is to prevent or correct insufficient oxygenation of the brain and heart.
- The management of a medical emergency starts with the assessment and, if necessary, the treatment of the airway, breathing and circulation (the ABCs of CPR). Only after the ABCs are addressed should the use of emergency drugs be considered.
- Six drugs should be readily available in a dental office emergency kit. The essential emergency drugs include oxygen, epinephrine, nitroglycerin, injectable diphenhydramine or chlorpheniramine, salbutamol\* inhalation aerosol, and ASA (aspirin).
- Dentists should know the indications and relevant doses for each of the essential emergency drugs.
- Depending on the type of practice



conducted by the dentist, supplementary drugs should also be considered for the office emergency kit.

PEAK (Practice Enhancement And Knowledge) is a College service for members, whose goal is to regularly provide Ontario dentists with copies of key articles on a wide range of clinical and non-clinical topics from the dental literature around the world. It is important to note that PEAK articles may contain opinions, views or statements that are not necessarily endorsed by the College. However, the PEAK advisory board is committed in its desire to provide quality material to enhance the knowledge and skills of member dentists.

If you have any suggestions for subjects to be addressed by PEAK, or questions about this membership service, please contact Dr. Michael Gardner, Assistant to the Registrar, Dental at 416-934-5616, toll free at 1-800-565-4591, or by e-mail at [mgardner@rcdso.org](mailto:mgardner@rcdso.org).

\* In the article, the list of essential emergency drugs includes the drug albuterol (Ventolin). Please note that, in Canada, the generic name for this drug is salbutamol.