

Training Bulletin

Personal Medical Information Programs and Products

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Introduction

Several organizations and companies promote and distribute programs and products that allow a person to identify and/or document their personal medical information. The purpose of these products and services is to provide medical personnel who will be responding in emergencies with vital information on such things as past medical history, medications (especially prescription information) and allergies. Paramedics need to be aware of these programs and products, understand their potential use and limitations.

Access to up-to-date patient health history and medical information can potentially save precious time in determining the nature of an emergency and initiating treatment for a patient, both at the scene and in the hospital. Often in a life threatening situation, the patient's condition limits the time available to locate medications and other clues to the patient's current health situation. Products and services that promote the keeping of medical information in pre-determined and readily identifiable locations may be helpful in addressing this problem.

Medical information products are particularly beneficial to elderly persons taking multiple prescribed medications, those who have complicated medical histories or those who require help to communicate important health information to emergency personnel. Awareness of these programs and products can be important to health care personnel if an individual is unconscious, confused or unable to communicate because of their medical condition, language barriers or age. Additionally, if primary caregivers are unavailable or disabled, small children may not be able to provide rescuers with much needed information on their condition or past medical history. Medical information products and programs may help address this need in these and other circumstances by providing medical history and other valuable information.

This training bulletin has been developed to provide paramedics with general information on some of the different programs and products available to the public. It also reviews the areas or situations in which emergency services workers might locate, identify and utilize these various products.

Important to Note

While personal medical information products may be helpful in emergency situations, they do not negate the need for paramedics to complete thorough medical assessments and gather pertinent history information for patients on every call. Paramedics must always attempt to verify that the information found pertains to the patient they are treating and that the information is current. The use of erroneous information or information that is not up-to-date may lead to inappropriate or deleterious interventions.

Child Seat Medical Identification System

A relatively new concept in providing easy access to medical and other personal information is the placement of packages attached to child safety and booster seats. These products include forms or cards on which medical and personal information can be filled in and include stickers to be affixed to the front and rear automobile windows and a protective plastic sleeve to hold the forms/cards. The completed medical information form or card is placed in the plastic sleeve which in turn is attached to the child car or booster seat, often with an adhesive strip or velcro. Emergency personnel should be alerted to the presence of the package by the window stickers.

Refrigerator or Other Containers

This type of product consists of a pre-printed medical information form to be completed by the occupants of the residence or business and an identifiable container to hold the completed form. Individuals complete the form with their personal medical and prescription information and place it in the container. The container is then located in the refrigerator where it can be easily accessed by emergency personnel. A magnet or sticker is placed on the refrigerator door to indicate that the medical information is inside. The refrigerator is an ideal location to store the container as it is easily located and common to almost all private residences. This product is widely promoted by service clubs and other professional organizations.

When paramedics encounter a patient who is unable to communicate, they should consider looking for evidence (for example stickers or magnets) that suggests there may be information in the refrigerator. Not only is the refrigerator where medical information may be stored, but also a location where other clues as to the person's medical current condition (i.e. medications such as insulin are routinely stored in the refrigerator) may be found. Caution must be exercised to determine if in fact a patient is a resident of the premises or a visitor.

Jewelry and Medical Information Tags

Some programs utilize jewelry as a means of quickly communicating a person's medical information. The person's medical condition is engraved on the back of a bracelet and/or necklace/pendant while the front usually has a logo or insignia to alert medical personnel that the jewelry contains medical information. Some people, for aesthetic or personal reasons, wear medical information jewelry in the form of an anklet. This type is not as common due to the fact that it can be obscured by footwear and easily missed by medical personnel, however paramedics need to be aware that these forms of jewelry do exist and should routinely check for them during their assessment of a patient.

The information contained on these products tends to be limited and generally restricted to major medical conditions and allergy information. Some bracelets and necklaces however, have an identification number and emergency contact number that healthcare personnel can call to access more detailed medical information in the case of an emergency.

Medical Diaries/Journals

Some individuals document their personal medical information and prescriptions in a diary or journal. These may be specifically designed to document medical information and be readily identifiable with logos or titles. Others may simply be a notebook or binder that a person utilizes to keep a record of their own medical information.

Often, this type of journal is kept at the bedside or on their person for easy access in the case of an emergency.

Cards

Some people keep a brief description of their medical history; prescriptions, emergency contact numbers, and physicians contact information, etc. on cards that they keep on their person, often in a wallet or credit card holder.

Summary

There are a number of products that are available for keeping a record of personal medical information. It is important for paramedics to be familiar with and consider that a person may be using one of these products when they are assessing a patient(s). These products may be an effective tool for gathering vital information that may be useful in determining the most appropriate management and transportation for patients, particularly those who are unable to communicate the information themselves.

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