

HEALTH CARE ON MODERN SHIPS

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ABSTRACT

Medical training for the requirements of the shipping industry, within the framework of the training of nautical officers for the merchant shipping and fishing industries, is intended to enable ships officers to initiate all measures necessary for maintaining the health of the crew, the passengers and other persons on board, to combat dangers to health, to provide health education, to recognize and correctly assess imminent or occurring impairment of health, and to provide assistance in case of injury and sickness.

The training is to enable the captain to ensure the protection of health on board in accordance with legal requirements. He can assign the task of medical care to one of his officers and consult other officers when important decisions have to be taken.

The number of ship's doctors is obviously decreasing all over the world, and thus also in the GDR. Only 5-10% of the ships registered in the GDR still have a doctor^{4,5,9,15}. This situation will no doubt continue in accordance with the continuing technical revolution in the shipping industry. However, this does not mean a neglect of medical care on the ships, and thus the training of responsible ship's officers for the medical care of the crews of ships without ship's doctors is an important requirement.

In the GDR the organization of medical care for ships' personnel, is based on certain national regulations^{1,2}. These stipulate that, on ships without a ship's doctor, the captain is responsible for organizing and implementing medical care measures on board.

In order to enable the captain to discharge this responsibility, certain material and personnel conditions are required. If we assume that the material conditions are available, there remains only the question of the personnel support afforded to the captain. After numerous discussions conducted over the last 10 years regarding the professional group which would be best suited to assist the captain in ensuring satisfactory medical care on board^{11,12,13,14} it was established that this would be the group of nautical officers^{3,8,9}.

There are several reasons for this opinion. Health care on board, and thus the taking of decisions regarding preventive, therapeutic and follow-up

measures, is one of the responsibilities of the captain, who himself is a nautical officer. As a rule, several nautical officers are required on board in order to maintain the shift system, and one of them can be assigned the function of health officer. As a result of the presence of several nautical officers, mutual consultation is possible in difficult cases, making it easier for the captain to bring the necessary decision. Although ship's crews will continue to be reduced in size as a result of automation, nautical officers will still continue to be required as long as the shipping industry exists. The protracted time involved in training seamen to technical college or university levels permits long-term dissemination of medical knowledge as an integral component of vocational training courses. The training of nautical officers is so specific to the vocation that the trained person can well be expected to remain in shipping for a long time.

These reasons caused us to combine an increasing amount of medical training with the training of nautical officers at technical college and university level¹⁰. Thus, over the last 10 years in the GDR 3 230 nautical officers received medical training through a 120 hour programme during three terms at the technical college for navigation.

Today, the subject "Medical Care on Sea-Going Ships" forms an integrated part of the training of nautical officers, and a large number of graduates have already presented final papers dealing with topics from this sphere.

The Medical Training of nautical officers together with the Medical Equipment⁷, the Guidelines for Medical Care on Sea-Going Ships and the Medical Radio Advisory Service⁶ form a complex whole which is to ensure that medical care is provided for personnel on ships without doctors in accordance with the particular conditions prevailing in the shipping industry.

In order to ensure that the training proceeds without interruption, a Department of Medical Training and Health Education was set up in 1974 at the Ingenieurhochschule für Seefahrt Warnemünde/Wustrow, the main training centre for naval officers in the GDR. The department provides lectures, seminars and practical training courses including lectures by specialists of the Medical Service of the GDR Transport Industry. Theoretical training is complemented by practical training in the department's training laboratory. Furthermore, close contact is currently maintained with the training laboratory of the Ships Safety Service with the aim of drawing up a common training programme.

Students and officers already in active service are given opportunity to gain experience with patients and to test and apply their knowledge by observational visits and practical training sessions at health service facilities which co-operate by contract.

In conformity with the principles adopted by the joint committee of WHO and the ILO in September, 1973¹⁵, the Medical Services of the Transport Industry, Directorate for Shipping, have set the following standards in order to raise health protection on board sea-going ships:

1. A 40-hour programme during vocational training, to raise and update the level of basic training for all seamen with respect to self-help and mutual assistance;

2. A 120-hour programme during three terms at technical college or university in order to intensify the medical training of all nautical officers with regard to the requirements of the shipping industry, and adjust it more to practical needs;
3. A 4-day refresher course at intervals of five years, to ensure that the medical training received by nautical officers remains ready for use.

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