Chapter 37 -
Emergencies for Patients with Special Challenges

OBJECTIVES

37.1 Define key terms introduced in this chapter. Slides 10, 12, 14, 22, 23, 25, 37, 40, 42, 47, 50, 53, 55, 59

37.2 Describe special challenges patients may have, including various disabilities, terminal illness, obesity, homelessness/poverty, and autism. Slides 10–19

37.3 Describe general considerations in responding to patients with special challenges. Slides 22–26

37.4 Recognize physical impairments and common medical devices used in the home care of patients with special challenges, including respiratory devices, cardiac devices, gastro urinary devices, central IV catheters and discuss EMT assessment and transport considerations for each. Slides 29–30, 32–62

continued
Chapter 37 - Emergencies for Patients with Special Challenges

**OBJECTIVES**

37.5 Explain why patients with special challenges are often especially vulnerable to abuse and neglect and what the EMT’s obligations are in such situations. Slides 64–66

**MULTIMEDIA**

- Slide 20 Autism Video

**CORE CONCEPTS**

- The variety of challenges that may be faced by patients with special needs
- Types of disabilities and challenges patients may have
- Special aspects of prehospital care for a patient with special needs
Chapter 37 - Emergencies for Patients with Special Challenges

**CORE CONCEPTS**

- Congenital and acquired diseases and conditions
- Types of advanced medical devices patients may rely on
- How to recognize and deal with cases of abuse and neglect

**Topics**

- Patients with Special Challenges
- General Considerations in Responding to Patients with Special Challenges
- Diseases and Conditions
- Advanced Medical Devices
- Abuse and Neglect

**Patients with Special Challenges**
Disability

- Condition interfering with the ability to engage in activities of daily living
- Developmental disability
  - Cerebral palsy, Down syndrome
- Result of traumatic injury or medical condition
  - Multiple sclerosis, Parkinson’s, stroke, traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury

Terminal Illness

- End stage cancer, heart failure, kidney failure, progressive fatal diseases (Huntington’s, Lou Gehrig’s)
- May depend on technology to sustain life or relieve pain
- Advance directives
- Special emotional needs

Obesity

- Increases risk of multiple diseases
- Special measures to care for obese patient
- Allow patient to assume comfortable position for breathing
- Have enough assistance when lifting or moving patient
Homelessness and Poverty

- Serious health problems related to homelessness and poverty
  - Mental health problems
  - Malnutrition
  - Substance abuse problems
  - HIV/AIDS
  - Tuberculosis
  - Pneumonia

Autism

- Affects 1 in 91 children
- Affects ability to communicate
- May need to modify assessment techniques and treatment protocols

ABCS of Dealing with Autistic Patients

- Awareness
- Basic
- Calm
- Safe
Chapter 37 - Emergencies for Patients with Special Challenges

**Awareness**
- EMT must adapt approach and strategies to patient
- Disruption of routine not well tolerated by patient
- Communication can be challenging
- May have escalation or meltdown—involuntary tantrum-like behavior

**Basic**
- Instructions—simple, clear precise
- Questions—short, closed-ended
- Equipment—keep to minimum; do not overstimulate
- Treatment—defer interventions that are precautions rather than necessary

**Calm**
- Calm creates calm
- Start with one-to-one contact
- Clear, controlled voice
- Empathy, compassion
- Take extra time—unless life-threatening emergency, follow patient's timeline
Chapter 37 - Emergencies for Patients with Special Challenges

**Safe**

- Begin treatment where patient is found
- Remove things that may aggravate child
- Do toe-to-head survey, one step at a time
- Consider taking breaks during exam
- Let patient tell you when ready for next step

**Autism Video**

Click here to view a video on the subject of autism.

**General Considerations in Responding to Patients with Special Challenges**
Chapter 37 - Emergencies_for_Patients_with_Special_Challenges

Advanced Medical Devices in the Home

Knowledgeable Caregivers

- Caregivers likely trained on device
- Ask: Has problem occurred before? What fixed it?
- Have you been taught how to fix this problem?
- Have you tried to fix this problem? What happened?
- How do you normally move patient?

Knowledgeable Patients
Chapter 37 - Emergencies for Patients with Special Challenges

Following Protocols

- Is the problem with the device life threatening?
- Do I have the knowledge to fix this problem?
- Do I have supplies needed to fix this problem?
- Is it within my protocols or within medical control authorization?

Think About It

- What is important to do with an autistic child who is escalating?
- What would be the most important question to ask yourself when a medical device fails?
Diseases and Conditions

Types of Diseases

- Congenital
  - Congenital heart disease, cleft palate, congenital deafness
- Acquired
  - COPD, AIDS, traumatic spinal cord injury, deafness

Special Concerns

- Patient with a chronic disease may experience sudden worsening of disease
- Patient may also develop acute illness
  - Acute illness may be more devastating because of coexisting chronic disease
Advanced Medical Devices

Respiratory Devices

- Continuous positive airway pressure devices
- Tracheostomy tubes
- Home ventilators

Continuous Positive Airway Pressure Devices (CPAP)
EMT Assessment and Transport
- Problems not usually related to machine
- Patient may wish to bring machine to hospital
- Alert ER staff of use in radio report

Tracheostomy Tubes
- Surgical opening through neck into trachea in which breathing tube is placed
- BVM fits on end of tube
- Mucus build-up in tube
- Patient may or may not be able to speak

EMT Assessment and Transport
- Check tube
- If clogged, clear using whistle tip catheter
- Patient may buck during suction
- May need to ventilate with BVM
- During transport, elevate patient’s head to allow drainage
Home Ventilators

EMT Assessment and Transport
- Make sure vent tube has no mucus build-up
- Assure that BVM is connected to oxygen
- If transporting ventilator, secure device

Cardiac Devices
- Implanted pacemaker
- Automatic implanted cardiac defibrillator (AICD)
- Left ventricular assist device (LVAD)
AICD

- Implanted in upper left chest or upper left abdominal quadrant
- Detects life-threatening cardiac rhythms
- Delivers shock to correct dysrhythmia
- Shock very painful to patient
- Cannot be felt by caregivers
Chapter 37 - Emergencies for Patients with Special Challenges

EMT Assessment and Transport
- May want to request ALS
- Treat as high-risk cardiac patient
- High-concentration oxygen
- Frequent reassessment
- If cardiac arrest, use CPR and AED as indicated

Left Ventricular Assist Device
- Battery failure: plug into AC source
- Pump failure: use hand or foot pump
- Battery should be secured so as not to pull tubing
Chapter 37 - Emergencies for Patients with Special Challenges

Gastrourinary Devices

- Feeding tubes
- Urinary catheters
- Ostomy bags

Feeding Tubes

Feeding Tubes
EMT Assessment and Transport

- Secure tube to patient’s body with tape prior to transport
- Keep nutrients higher than tube
- Put protective cap in place to prevent leakage
EMT Assessment and Transport

- During transport, keep catheter bag lower than patient (not on floor)
- Document any urine discoloration or odor
- Empty bag if one-third to one-half full
- Document amount emptied

Ostomy Bags

- Connected to site of colostomy or ileostomy
- Not visible through clothing
- Common problems: infection at stoma site, blockage, dislodgement

EMT Assessment and Transport

- Use care when transporting patient
- Object is to prevent breakage or dislodgement of bag
Chapter 37 - Emergencies for Patients with Special Challenges

Dialysis

- Patient has renal failure
- Dialysis replaces functions of kidney: waste removal and fluid removal
- Two forms of dialysis
  - Hemodialysis
  - Peritoneal dialysis

Hemodialysis

- Performed by attaching patient to external machine (dialyzer)
- Usually at dialysis center
- Large needles and tubing remove and return blood
- Complications: bleeding from A-V fistula, infection

Peritoneal Dialysis

- Permanent catheter implanted through abdominal wall into peritoneal cavity
- Dialysis solution runs into abdominal cavity and is absorbed by intestines
- Complications: dislodging of catheter, infection (peritonitis)
EMT Assessment and Transport

• Don’t take blood pressure on any arm with shunt, fistula, or graft
• Rupture of shunt, fistula, or graft causes fast, significant blood loss
• Direct pressure to control bleeding
• Treat for shock
• Transport

Central IV Catheters

• Surgically inserted for long-term delivery of medications or fluids
  – IV chemotherapy, parenteral nutrition
• Peripherally inserted central catheter (PICC)
• Central venous line
• Implanted port
• Complication: infection at site

EMT Assessment and Transport

• Use of central IV usually restricted to hospital personnel
• Be aware of type of catheter
• Avoid tugging
• Avoid contamination
Physical Impairments

- Hearing, sight, speech, walking, standing
- Each limitation requires different assessment/treatment approaches
- Physical impairment does not mean mental impairment
- Impairment may be partial or complete

EMT Assessment and Transport

- Provide necessary assistance
- Assess impairment—baseline or new
- Determine comfort level
- Explain actions and treatments
- When transporting, bring all aids required by patient

Abuse and Neglect
Chapter 37 - Emergencies_for_Patients_with_Special_Challenges

Vulnerable Population

- Patients dependent on others
- More vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse, exploitation, neglect
- May be children or adults
- Elderly especially vulnerable

What to Look For

- Stories that are inconsistent with injuries
- Multiple injuries in various stages of healing
- Repeated injuries
- Caregivers’ indifference to patient

What to Do

- Do not make accusations
- Do best to get patient out of environment
- Report suspicions according to requirements of jurisdiction
Chapter 37 - Emergencies for Patients with Special Challenges

Think About It

• How does your approach in cases of possible abuse or neglect differ from your approach in other cases?

Chapter Review

• Patients with special challenges include those who are homeless or living in poverty, are very obese, have sensory impairments, are terminally ill, have developmental disorders, and who are technology-dependent.

continued
Chapter Review

• A disability is a condition that interferes with a person's ability to engage in everyday activities, such as working or caring for oneself.
• The homeless, poor, and obese are at increased risk for health problems.

Chapter Review

• Do not assume that a particular patient with special challenges requires EMS for problems related to the disability or chronic condition.
• Treat patients with special challenges with empathy and respect.

Chapter Review

• When dealing with patients who have autism, use ABCS: Awareness, Basic, Calm, and Safety.
• Patients, their families, and their caregivers are often very knowledgeable about patient needs and special equipment. Rely on their expertise and involve them in care.
Remember

• Assistive equipment and special accommodations allow many with special challenges to live normal lives.
• Beware of overstimulating a patient with an autism spectrum disorder.

Remember

• To ensure proper care, you must recognize, understand, and evaluate the patient’s special health care challenges in addition to the presenting problem or chief complaint that led to the call to EMS.

Remember

• Caregivers and patients can provide valuable information on special health challenges and advanced medical devices.
• A chronic disease or medical condition may present as a primary problem or may complicate another illness or injury.
Chapter 37 - Emergencies_for_Patients_with_Special_Challenges

Remember

• When encountering an advanced medical device, consider what the device is doing for the patient and how important the device is to the patient’s survival.
• Special health challenges often make patients more vulnerable to abuse and neglect.

Questions to Consider

• What does ABCS stand for when treating an autistic child?
• What does a CPAP machine do?
• Can a responder be injured by an AICD that discharges?

Critical Thinking

• You are called to transport a ventilator patient. As you begin your survey, the ventilator stops functioning. What steps should you take to care for this patient? What transport considerations do you have?
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