

tim. Yet, on page 94 of the Red Cross *Standard First Aid and Safety Manual*, is the statement: "Do not allow anyone to slap you on your back if you choke and do not try to dislodge an object from another person's throat by this means, except as a last, desperate effort to save his life."

Following the death of my mother due to a choking incident, I researched the medical literature on choking and found the above contradiction. I then wrote to the National Academy of Sciences/National Research Council (after Mr. C.P. Dail, Jr., National Director, First Aid, American Red Cross, wrote that the NAS is the source of first aid advice for the ARC) requesting clarification of this serious discrepancy. I also requested scientific references for the backslap, since I had been unable to find any.

The NAS and Red Cross have taught the few millions who have attended their classes over the years a procedure that is complicated, can be dangerous and has—by NAS admission—no scientific basis. It is time they owned up to their error and publicly announced both the recall of the posters showing the alongside position of the rescuer treating a supine choking victim and

the withdrawal of recommendation for backslaps.

We seem to be involved in the middle of another "Watergate." But perhaps this time, we can and will write and express our opinions to the involved agencies and individuals who are entrusted with our interests and welfare. Approximately seventy to eighty thousand lives are needlessly snuffed out each year worldwide. We are dealing with human lives—possibly the life of a member of your family, a friend or neighbor; the dead or permanently brain-damaged choking victims are not cold statistics. This appalling state of indecisively ignoring a serious problem, and apparently hoping that it will go away, cannot be allowed to continue.

Henry J. Heimlich, M.D.

Ms. Mansoor wrote to Dr. McConnaughey requesting scientific references for the backslap. She also asked why Red Cross textbooks state "Do not allow anyone to slap you on your back if you choke and do not try to dislodge an object from another person's throat by this means, except as a last, desperate effort to save his life."

In reply, Dr. McConnaughey stated

K.W. Mansoor
Cincinnati, Ohio

The American Red Cross is currently teaching the back blow as the first procedure to use in saving a choking vic-

in a letter of March 14, 1979:

I do not know why the Red Cross Standard and Advanced First Aid manuals carry contradictory recommendations concerning the use of the backslap to relieve choking...Nor can I supply references for use of the backslap. The principal objection that has been raised to the backslap is that it might drive the obstruction further into the airway; however, I cannot say whether or not it was this consideration which the authors of the cited statement had in mind.*

My question is this: If Dr. McConaughey knows of no medical references supporting the use of back blows, why then has his organization (the National Academy of Sciences) been recommending back blows for 30 years as the treatment for saving a choking victim?

REFERENCE

1. American Red Cross. Standard First Aid and Personal Safety. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, p. 94, 1978.