

Reader Sees Contradictions

The American Red Cross is currently teaching the back blow as the first procedure to use in saving a choking victim. Yet in the Red Cross *Standard* manual on page 94 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 choking medical literature and the above contradictions. I then wrote to the National Academy of Sciences/National Research Council asking for clarification of this serious discrepancy. I also requested scientific references for the backslap since I had been unable to find any.

I received a letter from Dr. David A. McConaughy, Division of Medical Sciences, National Research Council, stating, "I do not know why the Red Cross *Standard* and *Advanced First Aid* manuals carry contradictory recommendations. . . Nor can I supply references for use of the back-slap." My reply to that letter was, ". . . although the Red Cross textbooks, the *Advanced* and the *Standard*, warn against the use of backslaps, and the preface states that contents were developed with the National Research Council, you cannot explain the recommendation. Should you not, therefore, withdraw the recommendation for back blows. . .?" I have received no answer to my certified letter.

I am concerned about the people who are spending time and money to take Red Cross first aid classes; therefore, I

wrote twice to Mr. C.P. Dail of the Red Cross and received lengthy two-page replies which did not answer my questions. I then wrote a third certified letter which has not been answered. My questions are these: 1) What are the published scientific references which caused the Red Cross to teach back blows? If there are none, please say so. 2) I have found that the Red Cross has been teaching back blows since 1945. How many scientifically documented lives have been saved by back blows alone? 3) If back blows are effective and not dangerous, why was the warning against back blows inserted into the Red Cross *Standard* textbook?

I found in the June issue of *Clinical Symposia*, Vol. 31, No. 3, extensive references going back 125 years all of which stressed that back blows, finger probes and turning a person upside down can cause a partial airway obstruction to become complete and can cause injury and death. That would seem to be why the Red Cross textbook says not to use backslaps except as a "last, desperate effort." The Heimlich Maneuver always drives an object toward the mouth; therefore, it can be used as soon as the person starts choking. Is it not true, then, that the Red Cross — in going against its own textbook recommendations by putting the backslap before the Heimlich Maneuver — is using the backslap at a time when it can do the most harm?

A tragedy such as the case of Gary Daniels ("The Peanut Butter Case," *Emergency*, June 1979) must not be allowed to happen again. His life was saved by the Heimlich Maneuver after he became unconscious and suffered brain damage due to a backslap which converted a partial block into a complete one. Unfortunately, Gary has been in a coma ever since the incident in 1975.

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