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Advice on Health (No. 85)

BLITZ WARFARE MODIFIES FIRST AID

(Written for "The Listener" by DR. H. B. TURBOTT, Director of the Division of School Hygiene, Health Department.)

BEFORE the present struggle upset our world the Spanish Civil War had produced modifications in first aid practice. Blitz casualties must have very little handling, and must be rushed to hospital as soon as possible. Blitz aid means getting to the spot with speed and protecting the injured from further damage from weak buildings, electrical wires, and so on. This duty to protect the injured from further damage was overlooked in a recent motor accident in our country. The amateur first-aiders covered and otherwise attended the casualty, leaving him correctly on the ground, but allowing him to be run over by a third car.

The next step is to size up the nature of all the casualties at the spot, and give the worst damaged first treatment and transport to hospital. The first action must always be the stopping of bleeding. The present war has shown that dry dressings and firm bandaging are sufficient for the purpose. Tourniquets are rarely required, usually only when limbs have been amputated at the original injury. A pad over a dry dressing, firmly bandaged, suffices to stop almost all blitz haemorrhages.

Dirt, Dust and Shock

Modern blitzes are productive of dust, rubble and dirt everywhere. In particular the injured will be filthy, possibly with clothes blow away, and dust and dirt blown into the skin and wounds. The casualty may be semi-choked with dust and rubble, which has to be removed from the mouth. Artificial respiration may be required at once because of this inhalation of sand or dust, or because of smoke, or gas-pipe breakages, electrical shock, pressure on the chest among demolished buildings, or simply from blast effect on lungs. Schafer's method is the most efficient, safest, simplest, and the least strenuous of all the manual methods of resuscitation.

Cleansing of wounds is not done by the first aider at the site. It wastes time.

Splinting also is frowned upon in blitz emergencies. Omitting splinting cuts out a lot of handling and again saves time. A broken arm is tied to the patient's trunk with broad bandage. A leg fracture is simply treated by placing a rolled blanket between the legs and tying them together. An exception is a broken knee-cap which is always splinted.

Treatment of Burns

The usual first aid for burns in blitzes is the application of a dry dressing, and speedy evacuation to a hospital. If the casualty cannot be evacuated immediately sterile dressings of sodium bicarbonate solution (one teaspoon to one pint) should be adequate for burns to any area. Moist dressings once begun must be kept wet while waiting, and during transport to hospital, by repeated saturation with bicarbonate solution from a bowl or sponge. Fluids, hot tea or coffee, must be given freely and morphine sulphate injections to relieve pain and help prevent shock. The burn casualty must be kept warm.

The moving of casualties is of vital importance, for care in handling lessens shock. Blanketing is of supreme value in minimising handling. In London the Wanstead method is now universal. Drill in lifting the injured gently on to stretchers, and in loading and unloading ambulances, may seem a waste of time, but is really a good investment in quick smooth action at the time of need. The whole aim of blitz first aid is to shorten the time between injury and the arrival at hospital.

In air raid cases shock is likely to be very marked. If the above principles have been followed shock will have been treated as you go along—checking the loss of blood, securing fractures simply and supporting injured parts to minimise pain, gentleness and smoothness in handling, lifting, and removing the patient, protection from chill by blankets and any form of heat possible, warm sweet drinks if conscious and not wounded in the abdomen—these are counter shock measures, but best of all is speed of transport to the base hospital where full and proper treatment can be begun.

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22B and 22A: "The United Nations", featuring Thomas Mitchell.

32B: "To the Young," featuring Joseph Julian.

42B: "Concerning Axis Propaganda", featuring Donald Crisp.