

Emergency Response Tips for Personal Trainers

In the delivery of personal fitness training services by any professional to any client untoward events can and do occur. Lawyers often refer to the issue as a question of foreseeability. Injuries and deaths in personal training activities are clearly foreseeable. Despite the best of circumstances such matters will occur no matter how infrequently. As a result, personal trainers must prepare to deal with such events or their conduct or lack thereof can be deemed to be substandard and therefore negligent.

Knowing that untoward events will occur during activity should prepare all fitness professionals to take steps to respond to these foreseeable events. The first step in the process is to assess the facility and its preparedness to respond to foreseeable emergency events. To complete this first step, fitness professionals need to assess their physical facility and the activities carried on in that arena. The following questions need to be asked:

- How far are public emergency response services (EMS)?
- What is the travel time between that EMS and the facility?
- Is the EMS composed of volunteers who must first transport themselves from wherever they are to the EMS unit for every response or are they employed and readily available at the EMS unit?
- Is the response time between an EMS unit and the facility fast enough for EMS to arrive to adequately address an emergency event taking place in the facility?
- If not fast enough, what must the facility do, if anything, to respond to client needs until EMS can arrive?
- Should the facility have its own emergency response plan to carry out until EMS arrives or in the event that EMS services are not needed?
- If so, is first aid help available? Is CPR trained staff available? Is an AED required or available?
- Does the facility have a land line or lines available to summon off premises EMS to the facility? If not, will cell phones suffice?

How these questions and others are addressed will determine what facilities and professionals need to do to adequately plan for responding to foreseeable events. In order to raise the right questions and secure the proper answers for the purposes of putting emergency response services into play in the event of need, professionals should form a small core group to develop an Emergency Action Plan (EAP). The plan should be developed by facility personnel along with representatives from the EMS unit which is likely to respond to facility needs. In the process, the care to be given by the local EMS unit must be defined and assessed. Then an appropriate facility response can be planned based upon the EMS services which can be provided.

Joint planning between a facility and a local EMS unit can greatly assist in all of the foregoing. If a response by an EMS unit is more than a few minutes away, more emergency planning and

preparation will be required. Additional equipment will also then probably be required by the facility. However, first aid and CPR must be required as part of any emergency response plan. An AED may also be required by state law and/or particular circumstances. Both the International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association (IHRSA) and other fitness professional organizations recommend that these issues be dealt with by all health and fitness facilities.

Once a determination is made to establish the various components of a facility EAP, the steps to be taken, by whom and in which area(s) of the facility must be defined and established. Land line or cell phones must be available to summon EMS and facility assets such as first aid kits, CPR trained personnel and where necessary, AEDs, must be strategically placed. Regular steps must be taken to ensure that such equipment works, that it is kept in a state of readiness and available for use. Batteries for any such equipment need to be charged as needed and replaced when required or when recommended by equipment manufacturers. Such devices should be readily located and must not be kept under lock and key but rather must be accessible for use.

Emergency response plans need to be rehearsed and those rehearsals need to be used to evaluate and modify emergency response planning. Records of rehearsals need to be created and preserved to prove the validity of such plans and the effectiveness of a facility's response. Numerous other factors must be identified and evaluated. We shall explore some of these issues in one of the next columns.

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