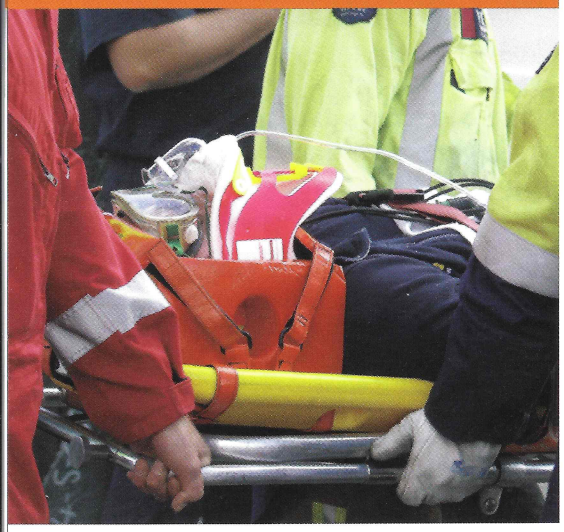

Preparing for Response:

The Bariatric Patient

David A. Bradley, B.S., NREMT-P, VFIS Director of EMS Programs/Education Specialist

Emergency service organizations (ESOs) are often encountering larger patients that can challenge the responder's ability to safely move the patient. In order to better prepare for a response to a bariatric patient, it is important for an ESO to develop a guideline.

Body Mass Index (BMI) is a number calculated from a person's weight and height. BMI provides a reliable indicator of body fatness for most people and is used to screen for weight categories that may lead to health problems. According to the United States Health and Human Services calculator, a person is overweight if his/her BMI is between 25 and 29.9 and obese if their BMI is 30 and above. There is also a specific BMI scale for adolescents and pediatrics.

A survey by the National Association of EMTs found that 47 percent of providers had suffered back injuries while performing their duties. A Bureau of Labor and Statistics report and a study done by Brian J. Maguire, Dr.PH, MSA, EMT-P found that the EMS injury rate is significantly higher than the average occupational injury rate.

To prepare for a response to a bariatric patient, consider the following:

What defines a bariatric patient?

Definitions vary widely, however, a Web search found many ESO and health care Web sites identify a bariatric patient as one who weighs more than 350 pounds and/or is over 26 inches wide.

How many bariatric patients do I encounter monthly/annually?

This might be difficult to retrospectively evaluate, however, ESOs can identify the situations where a large patient challenged responders.

What equipment do I have for a bariatric response?

Do an inventory of your current equipment. Determine how much weight your backboard, stairchair, stretcher and other patient moving equipment can handle.

What equipment do I need?

In recent years, several manufacturers have developed specially engineered patient-moving systems that assist in the movement of larger patients. These include air-powered lift systems, polycarbonate ramps and electric winches with automatic braking systems. HoverTech International has developed a HoverJack and HoverMatt system for moving larger patients. Both Stryker and Ferno have developed power stretchers that limit the amount of lifting required by responders, stretchers that can handle greater than 1,000 pounds and new stretcher loading systems such as Ferno's "Smart Load" and Stryker's "Power-LOAD" systems.

Do I have a bariatric ambulance?

Every ESO does not need a bariatric ambulance. However, identify how to access the services of a bariatric ambulance if needed. Bariatric units usually include both customized stretchers and modified suspension/loading systems. Many include a ramp-and-winch system as well.

Do I have patient handling education and training?

Education and training can include a wide-ranging patient handling program with a goal of reducing responder and patient injuries. Give specific focus to bariatric patient transports.

With preparation and planning, an ESO can provide a skilled, competent and professional transport modality for the bariatric patient.