THE WILDERNESS INSTRUCTOR

Introduction to: New Methods for Practice Oriented Post-Graduate Medical Education: Training of a Ski-Camp Doctor in Hungary

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This journal has published many articles on programs that train physicians and medical students in wilderness medicine. In the United States, several medical schools have introduced it as a very popular elective, and someday it may be recognized as a specialty. In Europe and Great Britain, physicians can earn a diploma in mountain medicine that qualifies them to lead mountain rescue teams or function as an expedition physician. Hungary, however, is in the unusual situation of having many enthusiastic skiers but no ski slopes. So Hungarian skiers (including groups of school children) need to travel to other countries in order to enjoy their sport. Because of injuries on these trips, the authors of this article have developed a program to train physicians in the knowledge and skills they need to prevent and treat injuries on the ski slopes.

While the Hungarian program has adopted ideas from European diploma courses and the National Ski Patrol, it adds some features that are unusual if not unique. Since ski camp doctors care for their groups in foreign countries, which have their own EMS and medical systems, they need to know how these foreign systems work and be familiar with legal and insurance aspects of care. Also, since they travel with the group, they presumably

need to do medical screening and be prepared to meet any special needs required by pre-existing medical conditions. They may also need to educate the group in accident prevention. In some ways, their role seems to resemble that of physicians on cruise ships.

As in the European diploma courses, the Hungarian program trains physicians in alpine and winter survival skills, as well as wilderness and travel medicine, so that they can take care of themselves and their patients. The National Ski Patrol and its European equivalents have similar training programs, though only a small minority of their patrollers are physicians. Like the Ski Patrol, the Hungarian program attracts candidates by giving them the opportunity not only to ski, but also to improve their skiing skills with expert instruction. It also resembles the Ski Patrol by encouraging its graduates to assume an educational and patient care role.

This program is yet another example of how wilderness medicine is not only becoming increasingly recognized as an important discipline, but also of how it is helping to bridge the gaps between medical specialties and other disciplines that help people to remain healthy and fit.