Student group aids in emergency calls at campus events

BY MASSIE SANTOS BALLON

The video posted on YouTube shows it all: Teams of students calmly but quickly driving around Stanford in a golf cart, rushing to mock medical calls. A student has tripped and fallen headlong down some steps at the stadium; a girl in the bleachers needs oxygen; there are repeated chest compressions administered to CPR dummies seemingly in synch with the rock song serving as the video’s soundtrack. The montage was of scenes from last Sunday’s training day for the Stanford Emergency Medical Service (StEMS).

Under the emergency gear and uniforms is a core group of students with prior experience as emergency medical technicians (EMTs) who met during the yearlong class Surgery 211, which teaches basic emergency medical training procedures. They wanted to sharpen their skills on campus, and so formed the student-run standby medical organization. StEMS, which debuted at last year’s Commencement, works with the Department of Public Safety and Vaden Health Center.

"What really brought us all together is a background in EMS," said senior Florian Schmitzberger, co-founder and president of StEMS. "Our members come mostly from people interested in doing medicine later on in life."

Schmitzberger, whose own EMT training comes from a year of service in the Austrian military, expects to graduate this year with a bachelor’s degree in biomedical computation. He said he intends to go to medical school after earning a master’s degree in biomedical informatics.

StEMS teams have logged nearly 1,000 person-hours, handling more than 125 cases to date, including diabetic emergencies, respiratory problems and some calls that were likely strokes or seizures, according to Schmitzberger.

"Our members routinely utilize almost all skills learned in their EMT training due to the great variety in emergency calls," he said. "Luckily we did not yet have to use an AED [automated external defibrillator], but each of our teams is fully trained and equipped for any emergency, including a cardiac arrest."

Since its inception last year, membership has tripled to 25, and Schmitzberger said they remain eager about recruiting more qualified candidates. But the requirements are a bit more stringent than the average student club.

Stanford students, faculty and staff are invited to join, but candidates must be currently certified in CPR and be EMT-1 (basic) certified in Santa Clara County. Schmitzberger said the group often directs interested individuals who don’t yet have these certifications to the Surg 211 class or other EMT courses in the area, such as at nearby Foothill College. Beyond that, each applicant’s references are reviewed prior to their admission as a probationary member under a mentor. The candidate’s skills and medical knowledge are then subject to evaluation by StEMS officers before full-fledged membership is awarded.

Once fully admitted, each member must work at least four events per year and two training events. Schmitzberger said most StEMS members and even a few students in the Surg 211 class attended the training on April 13. And with so many different events on campus that StEMS teams may be called on by organizers to attend, members can meet StEMS requirements without disrupting their coursework, he said.

“We have volunteer sign-ups,” Schmitzberger said. "We try to be as flexible as possible in order for students to keep up."

StEMS teams will once again be on hand for this year’s Commencement, as well as more immediate events, such as the annual Stanford Powwow weekend (May 9-11) and the Exotic Erotic student party, also next month. Then for the upcoming football season, StEMS teams will work the stands with emergency medical service provider AMR.

For more information, visit http://stems.stanford.edu. Anyone interested in requesting StEMS services at campus events may contact the group at StanfordEMS@gmail.com.

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