Medical Topic of the Quarter– Basic Wound Care

While at sea, you have probably either personally experienced or helped care for a shipmate who has experienced a cut (laceration) or scrape (abrasion). Perhaps you have seen even worse such as a crush injury or an amputation. What are some basic things you can do to help treat these wounds in the first several minutes to hours after the injury?

Stop any heavy bleeding—Apply direct pressure to the wound and elevate it above the heart. Call GW MMA for further advice if bleeding still isn’t controlled.

Assess for other injuries—If the wound occurred from a fall or a direct blow from an object, does the patient have any other signs or trauma? Did he lose consciousness?

Assess for any injury to underlying bones or soft tissue—Does the patient have any weakness or limits to his range of motion in the injured extremity? Does he have any tingling or numbness? Is the patient missing any large pieces of flesh (an avulsion injury) or bone (an amputation)?

Wash the wound thoroughly—The best way to do this aboard a ship is to clean the wound with lukewarm running water for several minutes. Do not soak or scrub a wound and do not apply hydrogen peroxide, alcohol or betadine to the wound.

Consult GW MMA for advice on further wound care or closure techniques. Digital photographs of the wound are very helpful for the physician on call to determine the best course of treatment and follow up. It is best to call MMA as soon as the injury occurs so that any complications can be addressed quickly. Some wounds are time sensitive!!

Provider Highlight– Alex Lee PA-C

Alex Lee joined GW MMA in January 2013 and currently serves as one of two physician assistants (PA) in the program. In his role as a clinical coordinator, he follows all active cases, provides continuity of care for on-call physicians, closes cases when the medical complaint is resolved or the mariner has sought care in port, and corresponds directly with client companies to provide documentation and answer any questions. He is a 2010 graduate of the George Washington University PA Program and is currently in practice at the George Washington University Hospital Emergency Department and the Washington DC Veterans Affairs Hospital. Prior to his career as a PA, Alex was a scientist with the Federal Government and also volunteered in his community as an EMT and Firefighter. When not working in the emergency department, you can usually find him spending time with his wife and two sons.