

Local & Regional EMS News

by Kathy Clayton

Hotter 'N Hell Hundred medical care



Medics from AMR prepare patient Rob Stork for transport during the Hotter 'N Hell Hundred in Wichita Falls. Photo by Bradley Wilson.

Even at the starting line, it is evident that providing prehospital health care is not a goal of organizers of the Hotter 'N Hell Hundred race in Wichita Falls, the largest sanctioned century bicycle ride in the United States. For the nearly 14,000 riders, Executive Director Ben "Chip" Filer said the goal is to eliminate the need for any hospital care at all.

"One of our primary goals is to ensure that everyone who comes to the race goes home vertical," he said. With more than 1,000 medical volunteers at 15 stops along the 100-mile route, he said the medical staff, doctors, EMS personnel, nurses and others "can do a lot of stuff out there that would normally send people to the hospital."

Their efforts paid off. Although medical staff saw many people

throughout the August day in 2012, only 14 ended up in local emergency departments.

This year it wasn't the heat that caused problems for riders, it was the wind. Kim Stringfellow, a nurse working at the final rest stop before the finish, said, "The temperature is milder than in past years, but the wind is worse. (The bikers) are coming in more tired."

Despite the wind and heat, the medical team, including doctors, nurses, paramedics, EMTs, physician assistants, nurse practitioners and others, staffing the medical tents all along the route, was prepared. The on-site staff, along with American Medical Response ambulances that provide prehospital care in Wichita Falls and Air Evac Lifeteam that provides

helicopter support, provided routine medical care including suturing wounds, IV fluid therapy and massages for muscle cramps. But they worried most about the potential for life-threatening, heat-related injuries.

Keith Williamson, university physician at Midwestern State University and medical director for the race, said the race was a tremendous learning opportunity. He said the medical staff members would see illnesses and injuries that they had not seen before.

While the bruises, broken bones and scrapes occupy most of the medical staff's time on race day, Williamson and the other medical staff members, all volunteers, spent most of their time prior to the race discussing how to treat heat-related injuries. Kenny Hoffman, operations supervisor for AMR, said he began watching the weather forecast a couple weeks before the race.

Despite temperatures on race day that average 95°F and have reached 109°F, this year it cooled down—down to a high of 96°F, fully 10 degrees lower than in 2011.

Medical staff members were on the look out not only for dehydration but also for hyponatremia, also called water intoxication, which results from drinking excess amounts of plain water, causing the blood serum level of sodium to go down. Hyponatremia is becoming more prevalent as participation in endurance races such as the Hotter 'N Hell Hundred increases, particularly by inexperienced or unacclimated athletes. As part of the medical protocols for the race, Williamson has a specific protocol for hyponatremia. In contrast to the protocol for dehydration and overheated riders, both of which call for which call for IV therapy, "hyponatremia can be worsened by hydration," Williamson states even in the IV protocol.

Submitted by Bradley Wilson, PhD, EMT-I