
'N.S. needs ambulance legislation'

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Diverse standards of training, legislation and funding of emergency medical care reflects its low priority as a health issue in Canada, says the author of an independent survey of provincial pre-hospital care.

David H. Goldstein, a fourth-year health education student at Dalhousie University, revealed the results of his study to a symposium at Victoria General Hospital Wednesday, pinpointing ambulance services as the "classic example" of how stan-

dards vary among provinces.

Focusing on Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in particular, he said they are the only provinces without legislation governing minimum standards of ambulance training and equipment.

Mr. Goldstein, who has wide experience as an emergency medical technician (paramedic) and volunteer ambulance attendant in New Hampshire and Nova Scotia, stressed that ambulance operators in the province are "doing the best job they can."

But he maintains legislated standards would guarantee better care.

The survey, carried out under the direction of Canadian Paralegic Association executive director Don Curran, with assistance from the Nova Scotia Ambulance Association, department of national health and wel-

fare and the Nova Scotia Medical society, shows British Columbia has the highest standards. It is a provincially-operated service.

Mr. Goldstein said the ambulance situation must be reviewed with a goal of asking whether contractual obligations which exist now between the government and ambulance operators are adequate for meeting public needs.

He is especially concerned with the incidence of traumatically induced spinal cord injuries and the training ambulance personnel have to handle them. Figures show that properly trained paramedics can reduce mortality significantly for certain injuries.

Mr. Goldstein called for the immediate transfer of ambulance services from the jurisdiction of the department of social services to the provincial health department.

He said Nova Scotia ambulance operators cannot be held responsible for negligence if there are no laws governing training. The minimum requirements recommended in Nova Scotia are that attendants be 18 years old, hold a chauffeur's licence, pass a 16-hour St. John Ambulance first aid course and taken cardiac pulmonary resuscitation training.

Mr. Goldstein told the symposium that the existing situation is "scandalous." He called on the profession to push for legislation.

His remarks drew support from Toronto orthopedic surgeon Dr. Bob McMurtry, who said the survey is an accurate overview of the existing facilities which are "hit and miss."

"Until the public, which mistakenly assumes this sector of health care is adequate, demands improvement from government, the status quo will prevail. Ambulances will be no more than health taxis."