

## **Emergency Medicine in Austria**

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Emergency and Disaster Medicine in Austria are mainly in the hands of emergency medicine organisations, technical emergency organisations and emergency physicians. The legal basis for training emergency medicine physicians, which was established in 1987 and prescribed the extent and content of their training, was initiated primarily by the Austrian Society of Emergency and Disaster Medicine. An amendment to the Austrian Physicians Law passed in 1998 contains in Section 40, Paragraphs 1-3 the new regulations governing medical practice as an emergency physician and in Section 40, Paragraphs 4-6 those defining the activities of the Head Emergency Physician. Physician-staffed emergency medicine systems are available to almost the entire population of Austria, even though the Alpine terrain does not always make it possible to keep within the optimal 15-minute rescue time.

Austria's emergency medicine systems are headed by physicians. As part of their duties they ensure the basic and continuing training of the staff physicians. The physicians in the Alpine rescue system are also responsible for the training, on-going training and consultation activities of that system. Furthermore they serve as the medical directors of Alpine rescue missions and accompany mountain expeditions and rescue search teams. Public health care officers working for the police force, in health care services and in state governments are also involved in emergency medicine. Their duties are largely of a public health nature but with law-enforced competence. Physicians at university hospitals and general hospitals, the final members in the chain of survival, are a special group. In addition to their most important duty, namely to finalize recovery of emergency patients, they are also responsible for teaching medical students and conducting postgraduate training sessions. Austria's first university department of emergency medicine was recently established in Vienna and has brought forth numerous internationally recognized scientific studies and publications.

On December 12th 2001 Austria introduced a law for paramedics, which regulates the profession of paramedics as well as their responsibilities. The law describes duties, the job profile and the legalization of their activities. It introduces a distinction between "Rettungssanitäter (RS)" (rescue paramedics) and "Notfallsanitäter (NFS)" (emergency paramedics), both of them being allowed to practise in cooperation with the following organisations: "Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund, Johanniter Unfall Hilfe, Malteser Hospital Dienst, Österreichisches Rotes Kreuz, Sanität des Bundesheeres", institutions of the government and other institutions under the leadership of an emergency physician. The training to become a rescue paramedic comprises 260 hours of partly theoretical, partly practical education. The training to become an emergency paramedic covers additional 480 hours of theoretical and practical training, including MICU and hospital practice. This training is supplemented by two stages of emergency competence certificates which allow the paramedics to perform respective medical treatment under strong legal prescriptions. The first stage deals with pharmaceuticals, venous access and infusions, the second stage covers artificial respiration and intubation.

For professions in the field of emergency medicine the law demands recertification at set intervals, because paramedics, and emergency physicians in particular, hold the lives of many people in their hands.

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