



Paramedics hit the beach

By Michael Franks

Each summer, people from every corner of the globe flock to Queensland's world-famous beaches.

No doubt this influx of tourists is a boon for the economy, but it also brings with it the potential for disaster.

The surf is a dangerous place for the uninitiated, and with such large numbers of people using our beaches, it's inevitable that accidents, injuries and hospitalisations will occur.

Watching over us while we enjoy the sand and surf are the dedicated

volunteers of Surf Life Saving Queensland (SLSQ), who provide a vital link in the chain of survival for emergency incidents on our beaches.

Surf lifesavers play a critical role in managing emergency situations on the beach before the arrival of paramedics, and can be credited with saving thousands of lives around the State every year.

According to QAS Southport Area Director, John Tesoriero, maintaining an effective working relationship between paramedics and volunteer lifesavers is the key

to good patient outcomes.

"It's extremely important that we have a very good relationship. We have an excellent relationship here on the Gold Coast and I'm sure it's the same Statewide," John said.

"The actual handover of the patient the most important aspect of our working relationship. It's all about that first link in the chain of survival and it's important for us to know that the treatment that has been given prior to our arrival has been given competently.

"If you can get that medical attention started prior to the



of competencies and skills were represented in each group.

“Each club has a roster system and builds their patrol crews by matching complementary skills,” George said.

“So on every patrol we must have someone that has a senior first aid certificate, someone with an advanced resuscitation certificate, someone with a defibrillation certificate, someone who can drive and crew our powercraft and also a patrol captain to coordinate the group.

“Surf Life Saving is actually a registered training organisation, so not only do we train our own volunteers, but we can also deliver our own nationally recognised courses to the community.”

SLSQ and QAS have established a joint policy for the handover of patients that details the roles and responsibilities of each organisation during beach and surf incidents.

“We basically run straight off the QAS patient handover policy. We have our own first aid logs that we use to document all of the patient’s

information and we provide an original copy of this to the paramedics,” George said.

“There are countless situations every year when the ambulance service responds to emergency situations on our beaches and it’s so important for our surf lifesavers to have a good understanding of the role of paramedics.”

Unpatrolled Beaches

Of course, not all of Queensland’s 714 accessible beaches are patrolled, which means paramedics may have to respond directly to emergencies on the beach.

“The workload for beach incidents is not extremely high, but obviously the potential is there considering the number of tourists visiting,” John Tesoriero said.

“A lot of times the lifesavers will have pulled someone from the surf and brought them off the beach, but there are also times when we have to get out onto the beach so we have four-wheel-drive vehicles on the Gold Coast to allow us to retrieve patients. >>

paramedics arriving on scene and then get them quickly to a medical facility, then the chances of survival increase dramatically.”

Qualifications

The minimum level of first aid qualification for volunteer surf lifesavers is the Bronze Medallion, which covers competencies such as first aid, resuscitation, rescue techniques and surf awareness.

The highest qualification is the Silver Medallion, which cover areas such as advanced resuscitation, life support and triage.

SLSQ’s Lifesaving Services Manager George Hill said surf clubs structured their beach patrols to ensure a wide range



>> “Aside from our relationships with the lifesavers, we also work very closely with Volunteer Marine Rescue and Coast Guard crews in our area.

“We certainly encourage the building of relationships with all of these volunteer organisations and that helps us all work together to achieve the best possible outcomes for our community.”

Aiding this working relationship is the fact that many paramedics in South-east Queensland are also volunteer surf lifesavers.

“Over the years there’s been a lot of interaction between the two organisations. There are paramedics that are members of surf clubs and we actually have a couple of student paramedics on the coast that have come from surf lifesaving,” John said.

“So there are always a lot of people mixing in and taking knowledge back to their own organisations and it works really well.”

George Hill said SLSQ hoped to build on this crossover and strengthen ties with the QAS.

“A lot of paramedics are club members and in some of the smaller communities along the coast the clubs have grown very strong relationships with their local ambulance stations,” he said.

“In a recent report in the Emergency Management Australia journal, Queensland paramedics indicated their willingness to engage in more joint training programs with surf lifesaving and that’s something we are keen to pursue.

“Already, at Point Lookout on North Stradbroke Island, the lifesavers are part of the QAS First Responder program and that’s something we would like to encourage.

“We’re also working on some combined programs with QAS, such as potentially using the Queensland Combined Emergency Services Academy training centre for our first aid competitions.” ■



Paramedics and lifeguards on the Sunshine Coast have established a partnership aimed at saving lives on and near the beach. The Lifeguard Responder Program enables QAS Communications Officers to call local council-employed lifeguards to emergency incidents if they can get there before an ambulance. The QAS provides training in first aid, resuscitation and defibrillation to lifeguards, and has even based a paramedic, who conducts patrols on a mountain bike, at Mooloolaba Surf Club.

